

DE GRUYTER

Gerald Hartung

BEYOND THE BABYLONIAN TRAUMA

THEORIES OF LANGUAGE AND MODERN CULTURE
IN THE GERMAN-JEWISH CONTEXT

NEW STUDIES IN THE HISTORY AND
HISTORIOGRAPHY OF PHILOSOPHY

Gerald Hartung
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Theories of Language and Modern Culture in the
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Translated by Aengus Daly

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A language fills a niche in the honeycomb of potential perceptions and interpretations. It articulates a construct of values, interpretations, assumptions that no other language repeats exactly or replaces. Because our species has spoken and speaks in various different languages, it brings forth an abundance of environments and adapts itself to them. We speak worlds. Thus Babel was the opposite of a curse.

George Steiner (*Errata*)

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0 Introduction – The Event of Language

Language is the only chimera
Whose power to deceive is endless, it is an inexhaustibility,
That does not impoverish life.
Humans should learn to serve it!
(Karl Kraus)¹

This book is concerned with uncovering an almost forgotten tradition of linguistic and cultural theory, a tradition that extended from the middle of the 19th century to the first half of the 20th century. It concerns a school of thought that transposed the ancient enigma of the origin of language into “human nature”. Ultimately, it makes clear what was always already a given, i.e., that every linguistic theory implies an anthropological thesis. The following linguistic-theoretical reflections do not try to evade the ultimate consequences involved in thinking about language in a way that considers its anthropological implications. They make unequivocally clear that, in the interlacing of the mental and the physical, and especially when language is not also linked to the physical or material side of life, there is a danger of a lapse into idealism. On the other hand, these reflections also admit that when the possibility of a creative, spontaneous expressivity is not at least considered, there is also the threat of a naturalistic lapse in regarding the complexity of the phenomenon of language.

Language is neither a merely mental act nor a material process. Language is an occurrence. Language occurs as an interlacing of different aspects and dimensions of human life and in the meeting of human individuals. Each can be of very different duration. The material phonetic sound, the medium of communication, only loosely binds thoughts and expression together. The duration of a phonetic sound in the inter-human field is also slight. Nevertheless, something originates during the occurrence of language that continues to have an effect. There arises a form of community, a co-existing which is neither given necessarily by the external conditions nor haphazardly chosen in arbitrary actions. The reliability of linguistic expression, insofar as a thought is correlated with it and it reaches someone else, is not a given in each particular situation but rather generated in each particular case. This concept has implications for anthropological theory because ‘the human’ does not exist as a general condition. What exists are moments and aspects of an individual life, which articulate themselves differently. Like language, the individual is a product of certain situations in life, such as

1 Kraus, “Die Sprache”, p. 373.

those we see in conversation. This also holds for cultures, which are dynamic structures and are in no way pre-given or even natural things.

At the outset of this work, a few explanations may suffice to make the challenge posed by a linguistic and cultural-theoretical reflection, one that rejects any localization in principle of language, the human life-form, its culture in a pre-defined, seemingly self-evident and familiar horizon, comprehensible. What is at issue here is simply the undermining of the rigid boundaries between I and you, between one's own and the alien, and thereafter delegating the project of drawing boundaries to the situation in which humans meet and create relationships between themselves – seeing that there can be no enduring coexistence under the condition of a radical formlessness and boundlessness.

General explanations of the systematic form of a concept of linguistic and cultural theory have a historical dimension. The selection of approaches that are developed in the framework of the present study support this. The tradition of linguistic theory, which has become part of linguistic anthropology, is based on the individual contributions of “Jews of German language” (Hannah Arendt). This is no accident.² There are good reasons for assuming that a whole variety of socio-cultural factors in the 19th century generated the hope that the path to acceptance into society is primarily enabled by co-belonging to the German linguistic community.³ Thus, in his treatise *Die Sprache*, the linguistic sceptic Fritz Mauthner (see Chapter 6, below) claims that a semantic shift took place in the meaning of the word “Volk”, “people”, in Germanic lands. While once it meant a “band of warriors”, a dictionary from that time describes a “Volk” as “a group held together through a community of language”. And Mauthner added by way of explanation that “until the year 1870 [...] nothing else [could be] understood as the German people than a crowd with a common German language”.⁴

Although Mauthner does not want to overstretch the social and cultural-historical significance of this connection, it is nonetheless significant. Linguistic and cultural theorists in the German-Jewish context initiated a debate concerning language as a fundamental structure of human life, in a time period when, for several decades, the socio-cultural context championed membership of the

² See in particular Stephan Braese's *Eine europäische Sprache – Deutsche Sprachkultur von Juden 1760–1930* which instances comprehensive considerations on linguistic theory in the 19th and 20th century with particular incidental treatments of Karl Kraus, Walter Benjamin and Sigmund Freud. The postscript especially underlines once more the special character of a linguistic culture that was composed of German speaking European Jews.

³ See Trautmann-Waller (ed.), *References juives et identités scientifiques en Allemagne*.

⁴ Mauthner, *Die Sprache*, pp. 47–48.

language of a people as the medium of social integration. Evidence for this assumption is not lacking.⁵ The linguistic and cultural theorists in the German-Jewish context provided the key impetus to the debate concerning language and linguistic anthropology. All the same, it would be inadmissible to simply trace their engagement either back to the socio-cultural context or more directly back to Jewish sources. Although such attempts have been repeatedly made, in the following I will be more concerned to present the wealth of their perspectives and the diversity of their respective positions.

Of course, I also do not want to ignore the fact that a naive discourse about the German-Jewish context does not remain an option for many. While Hermann Cohen could still directly address the topic “Germanness and Jewishness” (see Chapter 7 below) and thus speak of a “German-Jewish symbiosis”,⁶ after the Shoah and over the decades such a discourse has become “an impossible topic” in Germany.⁷ The present study does therefore not want to be understood as either a commentary on, or continuation of the debate concerning German-Jewish symbiosis in the 19th and early 20th century or as the revision of this.⁸

What is at issue in the framework of this study are individual observations that lead to general theoretical considerations but do not require being embedded in a socio-cultural context. It suffices that one remains aware that the series of scholars who have their say here, from Heymann Steinthal to Ernst Cassirer, were conscious of their Judaic origin and referred to this origin in one way or another. What is essential is to show that they thought about [*nachgedacht haben*] the anthropological aspects of language. This can be done by showing that without their respective contribution, research in the philosophy of language, linguistics and cultural theory would have taken different directions and the debate as a whole would have been a poorer one altogether.

If one addition to this a conjecture can be ventured, then it is the following: it is surely no exaggeration to claim that these contributions contain the possibility of conducting a common conversation on the structures of human language and culture as well as on the nature of humanity. This conversation is not bound to specific interlocutors even though, at its beginnings, it had specific

5 See Volkov, “Sprache als Ort der Auseinandersetzung mit Juden und Judentum in Deutschland, 1780–1933”.

6 See Sauerland, “Im Namen einer deutsch-jüdischen Symbiose: Hermann Cohen”.

7 See Schulte, *Deutschtum und Judentum*, pp. 5–27; here p. 5. See Scholem, “Wider den Mythos vom deutsch-jüdischen ‘Gespräch’”, again Scholem, “Das deutsch-jüdische ‘Gespräch’”.

8 For this I refer to the readable and comprehensive works of Hans Liebschütz: *Das Judentum im deutschen Geschichtsbild von Hegel bis Max Weber*; *Das Judentum in der Deutschen Umwelt*; *Von Georg Simmel zu Franz Rosenzweig*.

addressees and in addition, historically speaking, it largely remained a one-sided offer of and invitation to an open process of fashioning and forming a common cultural identity.⁹ My intention is to take up [*aufzunehmen*] the loose threads of a conversation about linguistics and cultural-theoretical questions in the previously mentioned and exclusively indicative sense, and then to work through and offer a theory that is also worth thinking about outside of its socio-cultural context.

The topic of language is by no means conceived in its entirety. In social and cultural historical perspective, the current state of research is simply taken as a given.¹⁰ With regard to the history of science, there is an extensive list of studies that can also be referred to.¹¹ The topic of language is also not analysed with regard to its biological-ontological foundation as was done in the Chomsky era, nor is an evolutionary-historical hypothesis in Michael Tomasello's sense tested or tried out here.¹² In what follows, the discourse will also not be that of research into the foundations of a linguistic theology as has been pursued in current movements of Jewish philosophy. I want to disillusion any readers who might have had such expectations from the first few pages of this book. Conversely, however, I want to win over those who are interested in the interlacing of linguistic theory, anthropology and cultural philosophy (among whom may be some of the previously disappointed readers).

The point of departure for my investigations is the extensive work of the linguist Hermann Steinthal who, for over a period of more than thirty years, was preoccupied with the legacy of Wilhelm von Humboldt's research in comparative linguistics (Chapter 1). Steinthal fights with great enthusiasm, albeit at times rather doggedly and over-excitedly, but in truth most correctly, concerning the matter in question, remaining against a naturalistic reductionism in linguistic theory. He thereby succeeds in exposing the ideological premises of his opponents who already, in their striving towards the unity of nature and history, renounce or even denounce the creative powers of the individual, as well as the individual's spontaneity in its capacity to judge and ability to produce language. Steinthal fights against the tendency to neutralize socio-cultural oppositions and for the enabling of the diversity of linguistic and cultural expression with all the

⁹ See Susman, "Vom geistigen Anteil der Juden in der deutschen Geistesgeschichte"; Loevenstein, "Der jüdische Anteil an der deutschen Kultur".

¹⁰ See Brenner and Meyer (eds.), *Deutsch-jüdische Geschichte der Neuzeit*.

¹¹ See the individual studies in Barner and König (eds.), *Jüdische Intellektuelle und die Philologen in Deutschland 1871–1933*.

¹² See for background to the current debate Michael Tomasello's pioneering work *Die Ursprünge der menschlichen Kommunikation*.

means of scientific analysis and rhetoric at his disposal. The fundamental operation of his thinking is one that implies a change of perspective regarding the historical analysis of universal human phenomena. Instead of looking to the origin of humanity and remaining under the spell of this way of setting the question, he invites us to understand all socio-cultural forms, and language first of all as being the result of human productivity.

In Steinthal's view what is humanly possible does not arise from a pre-given nature of things, and certainly not that of the human itself. In his theoretical-linguistic reflections Steinthal sketches a concept of education primarily through the activity of speech that has a particularly anthropological premise: the human being is not determined by its origin but rather distinguishes itself exactly by being what it establishes in interaction with the world. Humanity's futurity, its basic "openness" for others, strangers and that which is not yet there distinguishes it – distinguishes us – from other forms of life.

Most importantly, Steinthal provided the template for all subsequent discussions. Central to this is the question concerning the human capacity for language, on which the development of the specifically human achievement of culture also depends, according to recent theoretical findings such as those, for example, of Michael Tomasello and his research group in Leipzig. However, these considerations have wider implications. The work of the linguistic researcher Lazarus Geiger (Chapter 2), besides its consideration of language as a "wonderful product" of human activity, also includes analyses of conversation, a consideration of humour, an investigation of tact, as well as reflections on the limits of language and symbolic function – of all of these being considered as forms of communication. The key player in the individual analyses of this study is the scholar Moritz Lazarus. The recollection of his accomplishments is the pioneering achievement of the Leipzig philosopher Klaus Christian Köhnke.¹³ It is only a question of time, as the contrary thesis will be on good grounds untenable, before Lazarus is recognized as the progenitor of modern cultural theory. His large collection of monographs, *The Life of the Soul [Das Leben der Seele]* (first edition: 1856–1860) is a previously unrecognized treasure-trove of psychological theory-formation, linguistic-philosophical analysis and cultural-theoretical reflection. In the framework of this particular study, he will be given his say with his considerations on the "spirit of language" (Chapter 3). In addition, his treatise *Das Gespräch* will illustrate what cultural theory in the second half of the 19th century was capable of achieving.

¹³ See Köhnke, "Einleitung", in: Lazarus, *Grundzüge der Völkerpsychologie und Kulturwissenschaft*, pp. IX–XLII.

An unknown side of the philosopher Hermann Cohen is revealed in the chapter entitled “The Peace of Humour” (Chapter 4), showing that at one point Cohen had a theory of culture in mind for which he provided building blocks in his ethical, aesthetic as well as religious-philosophical writings. A glance at Lazarus’ “Psychology of Humour” is instructive in this context as it brings the proximity of both thinkers into view. Lazarus’ wonderful phrase, depicting humour as the “religion of the spirit [*Religion des Geistes*]”, is the bridge between a psychological investigation (whose results Cohen takes up) and a religious-philosophical consideration of Judaism (whose consequences Lazarus shares only in an ethical regard). The discussion of the social phenomenon “tact” constitutes a further cultural theory in miniature that Georg Simmel expanded into a theory of social life, a theory in which the free and gratuitous recognition of the others for their own sake has a central role (Chapter 5). Traces of Lazarus’ psychological studies can also be found in Simmel’s treatise alongside precise observations on Kant, Schleiermacher and Herbart’s concepts. It is of great significance that the philosopher and social theoretician Theodor W. Adorno, in his “Reflections on a Damaged Life” (the subtitle of his *Minima Moralia*), speaks in the middle of the 20th century of a “dialectic of tact” and of its moment in history.

Fritz Mauthner’s works on linguistic critique are also a sign of a sceptical disenchantment. In its ruthlessness it could hardly be surpassed. The same goes for it as a self-critique (Chapter 6). Mauthner’s resignation in the face of the illusory nature of the human linguistic activity, which is not as frivolous as Nietzsche’s praise of lies in an extra-moral sense, is only comprehensible against the background of an almost unshakeable confidence [*Sprachvertrauens*] in language found in Steinthal, Geiger, Lazarus and Cohen. This confidence in the knowability of the world and the human capacity for forming and designing is worked out anew with Ernst Cassirer. He posits, with all the force of all arguments available, that the “correlation of self and world” (Wilhelm Dilthey) usually enables an integration of the self in its world (Chapter 7). Cassirer’s *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1923–1929) as well as its later revision as the *Essay on Man* (1944), mark a limit point of this notion.¹⁴

At this point a tradition of linguistic and cultural-theoretical reflections in the German-Jewish context ends, a tradition whose common denominator is that we humans are integrated in the social world and meet ourselves *in language*. The optimism of the 19th century, that had seen the detachment of the human being from the social determination of its origin and described its open-

¹⁴ See Hartung, *Das Maß des Menschen*, pp. 357–366.

ness for an undetermined future as the condition for the humanization of humanity, had found its expression in the above-named analysis of language, the development of language and reason, conversation, humour, and tact as well as, under negative auspices, in brilliant linguistic critique. What is at stake in all quarters here is a struggle for the freedom of the individual and a plea for the diversity of human forms and expression and of life.

The end of this tradition is marked in theory by the triumphant advance of naturalism in the natural and cultural sciences and the monstrous consequences of its practice in bio-politics; consequences that have shattered the self-image of our modern culture. Nevertheless, it is not legitimate to subsequently declare the theoreticians of a process of humanizing humanity [*Humanisierungsprozesses des Menschheit*] to be naïve in the light of the human catastrophe that originated in Germany. The linguistic and cultural theoreticians of the 19th century could only have a vague presentiment of the efficiency with which the next century would destroy the coordinates of trusted and (self-)evident dealings with the world, as well as the premises of an assumed orientation in the world. Ernst Cassirer's attempt to block out this insight and instead enlist Western history in support of his thesis saying that, in spite of all the setbacks, cultural development remains bound to "a deeper teleological ground", is almost despairing.

Hannah Arendt's analysis of totalitarianism can serve as the counterpoint to the approaches depicted here. Arendt's depiction of organized destruction of human individuality and socio-cultural plurality in the social mainstream and in the concentration camps as extra-territorial spaces delineates the vast field of inhumanity. Her phenomenological analysis of the fundamental experience of human co-existence under the conditions of totalitarian dominance, which she characterizes as the experience of "isolation" [*Verlassenheit*], is brilliant.¹⁵ This experience is a result of a shocking loss of trust and familiarity [*Vertraulichkeit*]. *In extremis*, a person can not only feel abandoned by others who no longer support [*halten*] him but also by a world that no longer tolerates him and by his very self insofar as the capability for distancing oneself from the world and differentiating between inner and outer perspective is lost or taken away. "In this situation, man loses trust in himself as the partner of his thoughts and that elementary confidence in the world which is necessary to make experiences at all. Self and world, capacity for thought and experience are lost at the same time."¹⁶

15 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 474, adding by way of explanation: "Isolation is that impasse into which men are driven when the political sphere of their lives, where the act together in the pursuit of a common concern, is destroyed."

16 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 477. "In dieser Verlassenheit gehen Selbst und Welt, und das heißt echte Denkfähigkeit und echte Erfahrungsfähigkeit, zugleich zugrunde." There is

In the following chapters this extreme consequence is placed in parentheses but it is not forgotten. In order to recognize what humanity is and can be, it helps to take a look at the distorted counterpart, the image of inhumanity. But this process quickly exhausts itself as well. So, in order to recognize what humanity as an ideal of cultural development actually is, the theoretical concepts of a humanization of humanity must be discussed. It is to this exact task that the following chapters are dedicated. The outline of a theory of modern culture is drawn and its main lines remain worthy of consideration today because they are dedicated to the building of the historical, socio-cultural world. It is this constructive feature that is key to a successful coexistence in a permanently changing world.

My thanks go to the colleagues in Erfurt, Heidelberg and Wuppertal who have motivated me to do research over the last decade. This includes intensive work with all persons contributing to the large project Foundations of the History of Philosophy, and especially to the German-speaking philosophy in the 19th century. It is to be hoped that in the future we will invest more energy in researching the history of philosophy during the last two centuries. We are still mainly just beginning in this effort. Gradually, our spiritual tradition fades in the face of the interest of wanting to understand the present only from its own and future perspectives. Those who want to enable the future and cling to the idea of a spiritual Europe, despite all setbacks, should look in the mirror of foregone epochs, while remembering all the ambivalences that historicizing processes entail. Theodor W. Adorno has cancelled and preserved this idea in a sentence that tells us that no tradition is to be conjured whose erasure of any reference to tradition leads us to follow a path into inhumanity.

no exact equivalent of this phrase in the original English text. The German quotes are from Arendt, *Elemente und Ursprünge totaler Herrschaft*, p. 975.

1 Of Language as an ‘Event’ – Heymann Steinthal

Language is not a thing, a powder,
But an event, like an explosion;
It is not an organ, such as the eye or ear,
But a capacity and activity, such as seeing and hearing.
So it was and so it is at all times.
(Heymann Steinthal)¹

The work of the linguist Heymann Steinthal is known only to a few scholars today. Yet Steinthal was involved in many debates in the second half of the 19th century, including those concerning the ‘struggle for the soul’ (Wilhelm Windelband) and the limit-questions of individual and social psychology or concerning the foundation of a ‘science of culture’.² His students were numerous and their names – from Hermann Cohen and Wilhelm Dilthey to Friedrich Paulsen on down to Georg Simmel – are an echo of his faded significance.

Of the rich tableau of possible histories of Steinthal’s impact only one question shall be of interest to us here, i. e., his influence on linguistic and cultural-theoretical reflections in his own time and extending to the work of the great theorists of language Ernst Cassirer and Ludwig Wittgenstein. I subscribe to Jürgen Trabant’s thesis that Ernst Cassirer rediscovered “the path which Humboldt took through transcendental philosophy, that means, the ‘anthropological’ and linguistic critique of the Kantian critique”.³ In the first volume of his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1923) and in a treatise on Humboldt’s linguistic philosophy, Cassirer himself had spoken of the “subterranean path from Kant to Humboldt” that led, via Steinthal’s work, to him.⁴ The aim of the following remarks is primarily to bring out the anthropological dimension of thinking about language in the 19th and early 20th century, whose beginnings lie in Humboldt’s linguistic

1 Steinthal, *Einleitung in die Psychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*, p. 85. And he adds on p. 86: “Its whole essence lies in its origin; because it is its essence to be always arising anew. It does not have a single origin in ancient times but as often as it appears, it establishes its origin.”

2 See for background Céline Trautmann-Waller’s *Aux origines d’une science allemande de la culture*.

3 Compare Trabant, *Traditionen Humboldts*, p. 67.

4 Compare Cassirer, “Die Kantischen Elemente in Wilhelm von Humboldts Sprachphilosophie”.

theory and its critique by Steinthal, and whose main theses reverberate in Casirer’s philosophy of culture.⁵

Steinthal’s theory of language is neither an entire systematic project in and of itself nor is it part of a philosophical system. Rather Steinthal works in the quarries of systematic philosophy, mainly that of Hegelian philosophy, and tackles aspects of this work in an unsystematic fashion, guided by his own questions. Steinthal’s theory of language is to a great extent an interpretative commentary on texts of Hegel the philosopher and Humboldt the linguist. It was his teacher Karl Wilhelm Ludwig Heyse who set him on this path.

1.1 Steinthal’s Mediation between Hegel and Humboldt

In two treatises from the year 1850 bearing the title *The Contemporary State of Linguistics* [*Der heutige Zustand der Sprachwissenschaft*] Steinthal speaks of the new German linguistics as beginning with three events. He is referring to the publication of three treatises, the first being Franz Bopp’s *Concerning the Conjugation System of the Sanskrit Language in Comparison with that of the Greek, Latin, Persian and Germanic Languages* [...] [*Über das Conjugationssystem der Sanskritsprache in Vergleichung mit jenem der griechischen, lateinischen, persischen und germanischen Sprache* [...] (Frankfurt/M. 1816), second, Jacob Grimm’s *German Grammar* [*Deutsche Grammatik*] (Göttingen 1819) followed by, third, Wilhelm von Humboldt’s academic treatise *Concerning the Comparative Study of Language in Reference to the Different Epochs of Linguistic Development* [*Ueber das vergleichende Sprachstudium in Beziehung auf die verschiedenen Epochen der Sprachentwicklung*] (1820; printed in Berlin 1822).⁶

Development in comparative linguistics led, in Steinthal’s view, to a splitting apart of a philosophical, that is *a priori*, and an empirical, that is *a posteriori*, science of language. His description of the state of linguistics in 1850 results in the demand for an overcoming of this opposition and the establishment of a

true science [...], which does not merely reconcile, unite the philosophical and the empirical, but merges them, so that it is neither the one nor the other, nor the sum of both, but

⁵ Compare Trabant’s *Traditionen Humboldts*, p. 56: “Humboldt is, in a certain respect, the first thinker who developed a theory of language that is an anthropology.” Ibid., p. 61: “In a certain respect it is also Steinthal’s merit that he has rescued the programme of a comprehensive ‘anthropological’ linguistics that aims at the ‘character’ of languages.”

⁶ Compare Steinthal, “Der heutige Zustand der Sprachwissenschaft (Erster Artikel)”, p. 116.

something new, a third, higher unity, which completely contains each of the components' essences.⁷

The question we are left with concerns our objective itself. Is it a question of empirical linguistic research or that of philosophy of language? Steinthal gives varying answers to this question and, in doing so, points to a general dilemma that became manifest in the relationship between philosophy and the sciences from the second half of the 19th century onwards. This dilemma concerns a fundamental impossibility of deciding either exclusively for the way via the *a priori* or for the way via the *a posteriori*. In other words, a theory-free empiricism is sheer nonsense while philosophical speculation that does not consider empirical data seems a ridiculous undertaking in itself. To seek an alternative here means engaging with Hegel's position on one hand and the positions of Herbart and Humboldt on the other.

In 1850 Steinthal makes it unmistakably clear that his quest for a third way for linguistics must address both the philosophical as well as the empirical side of the problem. Thus it is "the merit of Hegelian philosophy to have developed the philosophical a prioristic thinking in its purest form". In Hegel we see that presuppositionless thinking is not enough but it "just tends [*strebt ... hin*] back towards empiricism, so much so that" – as Steinthal observes ironically naming a contemporary constellation of speculative and empirical philosophy – "Hegel was named by Herbart as an empiricist".⁸ In Wilhelm von Humboldt, however, we see that comparative linguistic research leads to an "obscurity of representation" which it cannot fully comprehend with its own powers; "which is why it is correct to say that one cannot understand Humboldt other than by criticizing him at the same time, in which case, however, one is already beyond him".⁹ Steinthal's method for advancing the linguistic research of his time is to understand critique as a method of overstepping.

For a period of more than three decades, Steinthal had commented on Humboldt and repeatedly expressed his "admiration" of him. He continually emphasized that it is Humboldt's merit to have "found the enigma of language, to have depicted its wonderful nature, so full of contradictions".¹⁰ But Humboldt had only "depicted the miracle of language and for that very reason did not comprehend language".¹¹ Thus he did not, according to Steinthal, get beyond the oppo-

7 Steinthal, "Der heutige Zustand der Sprachwissenschaft (Zweiter Artikel)", p. 132.

8 Steinthal, "Der heutige Zustand der Sprachwissenschaft (Zweiter Artikel)", p. 132.

9 Steinthal, "Der heutige Zustand der Sprachwissenschaft (Zweiter Artikel)", p. 135.

10 Steinthal, "Der heutige Zustand der Sprachwissenschaft (Zweiter Artikel)", p. 136.

11 Steinthal, "Der heutige Zustand der Sprachwissenschaft (Zweiter Artikel)", p. 137.

sitions of spirit and nature, individual and general, but remained stuck in their mediation. In this way, he had transposed the Kantian dualism of *a priori* and *a posteriori* elements of human knowledge of reality into a series of developmental moments and conceived linguistic development as a dynamic duality of natural and spiritual factors. However in the end he only confirmed Kantian dualism (which for Steinthal was a synonym for mysticism).

Here Steinthal reveals himself “as a real Kantian”.¹² His critique of Humboldt arrives at the thesis that the latter had discovered but not understood the unity of language and spirit. Humboldt’s lack of understanding seduced him, even against his own insight, into retaining the notion of a “substantial form of language”.¹³

Despite this opposition Steinthal emphasizes their similarities over the course of much of his critique of Humboldt.¹⁴ Steinthal, like Humboldt, rejects the materialist thesis, represented by Marx amongst others, that language only originated among humans via the necessity for communication.¹⁵ He takes from Humboldt the conception of language in the sense of the activity of speaking; for him language is, as it says in a famous passage, “*Energeia*”, i.e. an activity of the ever self-repeating spirit that enables the articulated sounds to be the expression of thought. Furthermore, for Steinthal too language is the formative organ of thought [*das bildende Organ des Gedankens*]. There is identity between spirit and language in a sense that can only be grasped negatively for the time being: Language does not precede spirit as a spiritual substance but thought too does not precede language as a spiritual principle such that we can say of it that it is merely “incarnated” in this. To Steinthal, both of these positions seem to be an all too simple dualism.

In his treatise *The Classification of Languages represented as the Development of the Idea of Language* [*Die Classification der Sprachen dargestellt als die Entwicklung der Sprachidee*] (Berlin 1850) Steinthal provisionally names his decisive difference to Humboldt. He wants “to grasp the essence of language, which Humboldt had conceived in the form of substance, instead as concept, as

12 Steinthal, “Der heutige Zustand der Sprachwissenschaft (Zweiter Artikel)”, p. 137. Compare Donatella di Cesare’s “‘Innere Sprachform’. Humboldts Grenzbegriff, Steinthals Begriffsgrenze”, pp. 325–327.

13 Steinthal, *Charakteristik der Hauptsächlichsten Typen des Sprachbaues*, pp. 23–27.

14 Compare Trabant, “Ideelle Bezeichnung. Steinthals Humboldt-Kritik”, p. 263.

15 See Marx, “Die deutsche Ideologie (1845/46)”, here in the tradition of the materialists of the 18th century, p. 337: “[...] and language originates, like consciousness, first from the need, the necessity of communication with other humans.”

idea, as subject".¹⁶ This project leads him back to Hegel. Although Hegel had paid little attention to language, his statements are nonetheless important, providing signposts for linguistic theory. Hegel grasps language from two points of view, one physiological and the other mental. The physiological aspect of language indicates that this is an "incarnation of the mental".¹⁷ What is implied here is an "externalization of the movements of the soul which is necessary to the experience of the latter or which can serve to reveal the internal". Incarnation is here realized by the voice. Physiological-anthropological studies investigate the conditions of the abstract physicality of the voice – a kind of expression still related to that of the animal. It is a long way from there to articulated speech whose analysis, as Hegel specifically says, exceeds the scope and capability of an anthropological observation. The analysis of the internal aspect of language as a spiritual incarnation must be set in the context of a "system of intelligence". To understand the "sign-generating activity" in its overall effect, a two-fold perspective needs to be taken which is appropriate to both the internal as well as the external aspect of the process.¹⁸

The only place Hegel explicates these considerations is in paragraphs 458 and 459 of his *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline* [*Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse*] (1830). Nevertheless what is at stake is an important point of his philosophical programme. The paradox of human knowledge of reality becomes more apparent in sign-generating activity than in almost any other place. In signs, intuition, to which the negativity of spirit adheres because it is the counterpart of mental activity, is transferred into a "truthful form". This form is the living speech that is contained in the paradoxical figure, as it were, is an "existence in time" and the "disappearance of existence" – in order to mark the resounding and the fading away of tones.

While the living language is, on one hand, "the fulfilled utterance of self-announcing inwardness"¹⁹ and thus comes to disappear within and through expression, on the other hand, living speech itself flows into persisting structures of the linguistic world. Discourse and its system, that is, language, give an enduring existence to human feelings, intuitions and ideas [*Empfindungen, Anschauungen und Vorstellungen*]. Hegel had only sketched the dialectic of disappearing and enduring, of fleeting and self-solidifying moments within the process of language. In the framework of a genesis of subjective and objective spirit (which itself is to be read against the background of the statements of

¹⁶ Steinthal, *Classification der Sprachen dargestellt als die Entwicklung der Sprachidee*, p. 57.

¹⁷ See Hegel, *Enzyklopädie*, § 401, p. 113.

¹⁸ Hegel, *Enzyklopädie*, § 458, p. 270.

¹⁹ Hegel, *Enzyklopädie*, § 458, p. 271.

the great *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences in Outline* [*Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse*] as a theory of human culture), for him it is the systematic entry into the world of objective spirit. Hegel had no singular interest in an analysis of language and the linguistic structures of the human world. He says quite clearly: "Language comes into consideration here only according to the peculiar determination as a product of intelligence, namely to manifest its concepts in an external element."²⁰ He relegates investigations into the peculiar materiality of language to physiology and anthropology without expecting further insights for his own investigative goal.

Thus Hegel writes in § 459 of the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline*:

The peculiar elementary nature itself is based on [...] an internal symbolic, namely, on an anthropological articulation as a gesture of bodily linguistic expression [...]. The formal in language, however, is the work of the understanding, that builds [*einbildet*] its categories into it; this logical instinct brings forth the grammatical nature of categories.²¹

In other words, this means that although the material sound of language is due to the bodily constitution of the human, the structure of language, however, is a product of the 'logical instinct'. The dualism designated by Steinthal is in this way resolved in a procedural way, though it is not removed from the world but merely transformed. With this position Hegel had definitively influenced the linguistic theory of his time.

1.2 Philosophy of Language and Linguistics

There was no direct path from Hegel to linguistic theory. A mediator was needed. After 1830 the role of such a mediator between Hegelian philosophy and linguistics was filled by Karl Wilhelm Ludwig Heyse. The Berlin scholar taught in the university but an academic career remained closed to him. No work of his was published in his lifetime. Heymann Steinthal was Heyse's student and it is to him that we owe knowledge of Heyse's writings. Heyse was of inestimable value for Steinthal because he was able to show how Hegel and Humboldt could be integrated by him. In a letter to Heyse dated the 10th of January 1855 he wrote: "What you will publish now will show that you would not have had to wait for Humboldt and it will secure you a place in the history of our science."

²⁰ Hegel, *Enzyklopädie*, § 458, p. 271.

²¹ Hegel, *Enzyklopädie*, § 459, p. 272.

This place, if I remain to live, is certainly yours in spite of Grimm and Becker; for I will be the historian of our science.”²² In his preface to the posthumous edition of Heyse’s *System of Linguistics* [*System der Sprachwissenschaft*] (1856) Steinthal realises this intention.²³

Steinthal names the main point of Heyse’s conception directly: according to Steinthal, Heyse understood language as “a natural testimony of the human spirit” and defined three immanent developmental stages of language in a Hegelian sense. In this way he de-substantializes language and conceives external linguistic development as “the unfolding of the idea of language to a plurality of real language”. However, his most significant thought is arguably his defence of the hypothesis of the “original radical diversity of languages”, guided by the idea of an internal idea of language and its external manifestation.²⁴ Independently of Humboldt, Heyse had established the possibility of thinking about the radical individuality of languages which helps us to depart from Humboldt’s conception of a substantial form of language and to illuminate the obscure dark corners in describing linguistic development.

Heyse, in fact, distinguishes language in two ways. Subjectively considered, language is the act of speaking, that is, the expression of an interior. Taken objectively, it is the medium for expressing the interior. “Humans express their interiority that is basically their spiritual essence.” And in Hegel’s sense his definition of language reads: “Language is the free expression [*Äusserung*] or – taken objectively – the form of expression of the thinking spirit or the intelligence of human beings.”²⁵

The thinking spirit expresses itself in sounds. Linguistic sounds are the essential expression of the mental. Thus a more precise definition of language reads as follows: “Language is the expression (or objectively: the form of expression) of the thinking spirit in articulate sounds. It is essentially linguistic sound, reason having become sound.”²⁶ Here, the additional word “essentially” is decisive. Only if the linguistic form of the mental belongs wholly necessarily and essentially to the thinking mind, if it is thus adequate to anthropos in a fundamental way so as to incarnate itself in sounds, then can it also be maintained, without any doubt, that language is an integral component of human nature

22 Lazarus and Steinthal, *Die Begründer der Völkerpsychologie in ihren Briefen*, Vol. II/2, p. 405.

23 Heyse, *System der Sprachwissenschaft*, “Vorrede des Herausgebers”, pp. V–XII.

24 Heyse, *System der Sprachwissenschaft*, “Vorrede des Herausgebers”, p. VIII.

25 Heyse, *System der Sprachwissenschaft*, Part 1, 1. Abt., *Die Sprache in der Sphäre der Allgemeinheit, als Organ des Menschengestes überhaupt*, Chapter 1 “Begriff und Wesen der Sprache”, p. 27.

26 Heyse, *System der Sprachwissenschaft*, Part 1, p. 35.

without which, as Humboldt puts it, mankind would not be mankind. Language thus belongs essentially to the concept of humanity. This claim is further supported by an analysis of the internal structure of the individual human being and its external relations with the human species.²⁷

The anthropological basis of linguistic theory in Heyse rests on the following argument: It is beyond doubt that the free active spirit is bound to corporeality; this auturgy, however, is not a state but solely of the nature of a process. The thinking spirit must liberate itself from its state of bondage through its own activity – it “must objectivize itself”. That means it must present thoughts outside of itself. “The human, as sensible-spiritual individual, first arrives at the thought and simultaneously the concept of itself in its presenting intellectual content outside of itself and perceives itself, its thinking I, in this its free position.”²⁸ This conception of itself is the result of a developmental process. Heyse refers to Humboldt’s dictum that the human needs language for the “formation of its interiority”.

Heyse’s mixture of Hegel’s philosophy and Humboldt’s linguistic research is spectacular. At a first glance, however, the constellation is not clearly visible. Hegel claimed that there are two sides to the consideration of language – on one hand, the bodily expression of speech and on the other, a productive logical instinct, thus on one side the fullness of the material sound of language, and on the other the structure of the grammatical form of language. This is transferred by Heyse into a unified perspective of linguistic development, in which the material and the formal side of language are reciprocally conditioning. The point in stating this is that Hegel would not have gone this far because he grants priority to the formal side of language. There is ground for disagreement and Steinthal expresses this. For him, as opposed to Hegel, a theory of linguistic development is no longer an integral building block of philosophical logic.

But what do we mean when we speak of the development of language? From this side of speculative logic the concept of a merely natural development loses its limits, “the naturalistic movement in science”, only then to gain, as Wilhelm Dilthey writes to his correspondent Count Paul von Wartenberg, “something in-

27 Heyse, *System der Sprachwissenschaft*, Part 1, pp. 38ff. Compare to this the anthropological premise of Johann Gottfried Herder’s theory of language in *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache*, Part 2, pp. 80–81: “Considered as a naked, instinctless animal, man is the most abject of beings. [...] The instinctless, abject creature which came from the hands of nature so abandoned was also from the first moment the free, active rational creature that should and could not otherwise than help itself. All the deficiencies and needs as an animal were the pressing occasion to show itself as with all its powers as human.”

28 Heyse, *System der Sprachwissenschaft*, Part 1, p. 39.

exorable”.²⁹ In fact every single human as well as humanity as a whole is subject to a development which apparently can be read exclusively via its natural side. The human organism is a product of its natural history. Language on its material side, from the immediate to more refined articulation, has a part in this development. Accordingly, language is, as Heyse also says, an essential element of human nature. But its situation is – and Steinthal places great emphasis on this point – different from the other elements and functions of the human organism. Language

is not a purely natural function (like sensory activity [...]). It is an auturgy of the spirit that gradually constitutes itself in the individual and is practiced by different people in different ways. Indeed, it is something that is in the process of becoming [and] does not exist as finished in the human physical organism.³⁰

For Heyse the problem of ‘generality’ and ‘individuality’ arises in a wholly unique and peculiar way. As opposed to Jacob Grimm, who in his treatise *On the Origin of Language* had formulated the idea that language is originally implanted in the racial character of humanity and for this reason there are physiological and cultural linguistic limits that cannot be crossed, Heyse emphasizes the possibility of uniting the spiritually general and the naturally particular aspects of language in thinking:

Humanity however is, according to its essence, human everywhere, in spite of all the hereditary diversity of its physical organism; and language belongs to the mental essence, not to the physical organism of the human. No absolute and enduring partition can be drawn between the different human races in language.³¹

The necessity – or ‘essentiality’ – of linguistic expression for the intellect cannot be attributed to the spiritual side or the material side alone. Neither an idealistic nor a materialistic nor a dualistic explanatory model suffices to understand the phenomenon of human language in its complexity. When Heyse remarks that “language [...] [is] of necessity a human creation [*Erzeugniss des Menschen*]”³² then what is meant is that the essentiality of language springs from the interdependence of mental and natural factors. The 19th century had coined an unclear – and most of all misapplied – metaphor for this belonging together of mental and

29 Wilhelm Dilthey to Count Yorck [December 1888] in: Dilthey, *Briefwechsel zwischen Wilhelm Dilthey und dem Grafen Paul Yorck v. Wartenberg (1877–1897)*, p. 75.

30 Heyse, *System der Sprachwissenschaft*, Part 1, p. 46.

31 Heyse, *System der Sprachwissenschaft*, Part 1, p. 50.

32 Heyse, *System der Sprachwissenschaft*, Part 1, p. 52.

physical factors in a reciprocally conditioning dependence, both as regards the constitution of human life and of human actuality, i.e. the inner and the outer nature of humanity. I am referring to the “organism of language”. For Steinthal the difficulties with this metaphorical expression can scarcely be overestimated because everything that he vehemently rejects is condensed in his formulation, namely a warped reading of Humboldt, a Romanticism of nature as anti-modern attitude and the first beginnings of a crude naturalism.

Excursus on the Organism of Language

The concept of the organism had an astonishing career in the early 19th century – not only in linguistics³³ but also in jurisprudence and in romantic natural philosophy and the romantic theory of sciences.³⁴ The thought of “procreation” [*Zeugung*], “creation” [*Erzeugung*] and organic development prevails everywhere – from Schelling to Lotze, this thought is present in natural philosophy. It is thus no wonder that Humboldt also outlines a conception of the organic development of language and languages.³⁵

For example, Humboldt’s early essay on language *On Comparative Study of Language in Relation to the Different Epochs of Linguistic Development* [*Ueber das vergleichende Sprachstudium in Beziehung auf die verschiedenen Epochen der Sprachentwicklung*], which was read on the 29th of June 1820 at the Berlin

33 See Kerstin Kucharczik’s *Der Organismusbegriff in der Sprachwissenschaft des 19. Jahrhunderts*, pp. 146–178. See also Schmidt, *Die lebendige Sprache*, pp. 92–100.

34 See Johannes Müller’s *Handbuch der Physiologie des Menschen für Vorlesungen*, Vol. 1, Prolegomena, pp. 1–91; especially p. 21: “The organic power of the whole which conditions the existence of individuals has [...] the feature that it is generated the organs necessary to the whole from organic material. Some have believed that life or the activity of the organic body is only the consequence of harmony, of the interlocking of the wheels of the machine as it were [...]. Only this harmony of the parts necessary to the whole is yet not without the influence of a power that acts through the whole and is not dependent on individual parts and this power exists earlier than the presence of the harmonious parts of the whole.” Müller also speaks in a further line of argument of a “rational creative power”.

35 See Steinthal, “Der heutige Zustand der Sprachwissenschaft (Zweiter Artikel)”, p. 130. On Steinthal’s view both historical grammar and philosophical grammar in 1850 are dominated by the conception of language as “organism”. See Kerstin Kucharczik’s *Der Organismusbegriff in der Sprachwissenschaft des 19. Jahrhunderts*, pp. 179–190; especially p. 182: “The view that language developed organically goes closely together with Humboldt’s anthropological theories, which are based on the necessary connection between language and humanity. Humboldt conceives language as the expression of humanity, as the key to the understanding all that is human.”

Academy of the Sciences, says that: “The immediate exhalation of an organic being in its sensible and intellectual significance, in this it shares the nature of all organic life: each can only exist through the other, and everything can only exist through the one power that pervades the entirety.”³⁶ This small section of the text seems at first glance to provide a definition of language but, in its enigmatic nature, it undermines the very requirements of such a definition. Steinthal speaks of Humboldt’s “mysticism”. Even an extensive reading of the essay does not provide any clarification at all on the following points: How is the relationship between the sensible and the intellectual aspects of language to be determined? Is the constitution of an organic being founded in such a dual aspect? Is he speaking only of humans and thus of the language of humans or of the distribution of sensible and mental aspects in organic nature overall? How does a determination of human nature relate to the nature of ‘all’ that is organic? A comprehensive interaction in nature seems to be at issue in Humboldt’s claim: each is seen in relation with each and each is understood as constituted through the other.

For the philosophy of language this complex of questions can be reduced to one question: is the organic character of language based on the duality of the sensible and intellectual or does a preceding, fundamental organic power pervade this duality? In his work *The Organism of Language* [*Organism der Sprache*], whose second edition (1841) is dedicated to “the memory of Wilhelm von Humboldt”, Karl Ferdinand Becker gives an answer to this question that was, in its time, indeed influential and authoritative. Becker’s objective is to treat [*bearbeiten*] language physiologically and to depict all its conditions as organic conditions.

In the introductory section of *The Organism of Language in General* [*Der Organism der Sprache im Allgemeinen*] (§§ 1–12) Becker develops the essential features of his theory of language.³⁷ In Becker’s account, language is “a product of nature”. All natural beings have come into being and thus stand in the midst of a life-process. That applies to language too and this is why “the nature and essence of spoken language can first be truly understood when linguistic performance is recognized in its peculiar nature”.³⁸ Language is organic in that it is part of human nature, which it emerged from “with inner necessity”. It is “an inner need of human nature because the organic life of humanity cannot come

36 Humboldt, *Ueber das vergleichende Sprachstudium in Beziehung auf die verschiedenen Epochen der Sprachentwicklung*, pp. 240–241.

37 Becker, *Organism der Sprache*, Section 1, §§ 1–12, pp. 1–31.

38 Becker, *Organism der Sprache*, p. 1.

about, in its integrity as human life without this performance; and humanity is, as Wilh[elm]. v[on]. Humboldt says, only human through language".³⁹

In Becker's account the theory of language is the "physiology of language".⁴⁰ The task of general physiology is to describe the totality of the organism of life, and this means nothing less than to extrapolate the idea that all life is directed and furnished by purpose. This teleological principle is also applied to language.⁴¹ Becker carries the analogy of nature and language to such a point that he presupposes a general life and 'a language' that differentiates itself in an "infinite manifoldness of particular species and subspecies".⁴² Ontologically speaking, unity and the one unified principle of actualization precede the diversity of forms [*Gestaltungsformen*]. Thus Becker interprets Humboldt's conflicting passage against the background of his immanent natural teleology. All that exists does so only through the one power that pervades everything. Human language is an organism because it is part of an all-encompassing interrelatedness of nature, hence it is an aspect of natural events which are themselves to be understood teleologically and thereby as an expression of a unity of all that is natural and human.⁴³ Even the diversity of languages must not deceive us regarding the fact that language is *not* a product of culture. "When one regards language as a product of culture [...] one misunderstands the nature of humanity and the necessarily given unity of intelligence and language that comes with it".⁴⁴

Historical linguistic research is thus related to the theory of language as natural history is related to the theory of nature. To speak of the organism of language means in Becker nothing other than to understand the diversity of languages as purposive with regard to one another because they can be traced back to a common principle, a natural force. The human essence is here conceived, as Marx already emphasizes (albeit with a different argumentative thrust and speaking as a Hegelian against Feuerbach), "only as 'genus', as inner, mute generality connecting many individuals *naturally*".⁴⁵

Becker's view is reminiscent of Herder's theory of organic forces, of Schelling's philosophy of nature and of Goethean pantheism. This is in no way new

39 Becker, *Organism der Sprache*, p. 3.

40 Becker, *Organism der Sprache*, p. 9.

41 On this see Trendelenburg, *Logische Untersuchungen*, Vol. 2, pp. 382–383, and Eric Grumbach's "L'organisme" au 19ème siècle en Allemagne".

42 Becker, *Organism der Sprache*, p. 10.

43 See Hartung, "Von einer Misshandlung des Zweckbegriffs. F.A. Trendelenburgs Kritik der praktischen Philosophie Herbarts und eine Anmerkung zur Lehre Darwins".

44 Becker, *Organism der Sprache*, p. 15.

45 Marx, "Die deutsche Ideologie. A. Thesen über Feuerbach", p. 340.

or ground-breaking for linguistics. Thus seen, it is almost incomprehensible that Steinthal devotes more than one hundred pages to Becker, alternating between clear-sighted textual analysis, wild polemic and scathing critique.⁴⁶ At second glance, it is clear that Steinthal takes in and sharpens his teacher Heyse's individual points of criticism. But Heyse's statement that Becker's theory represents the prevailing view in linguistics in itself makes little sense. It is more likely that the dispute here revolves around the legitimate legacy of Humboldtian linguistics.

In places where the criticism is aimed at the matter itself what is at issue is the question of whether an ambiguity which exists in Humboldt's work is not made even more acute by Becker. Heyse had already explicitly referred to the cited Humboldt passage and confirmed that language, on Humboldt's conception, exhibits an "organic quality [*organische Beschaffenheit*]" which only indicates its formal characteristic. Becker's mistake, then, is that he turns "the organic into the substantial determination of language which supposedly expresses the essence, [and] the entire inner nature of language".⁴⁷ Heyse's examination of this mistake comes to the conclusion that we are legitimated in saying language is an "organic performance [*Verrichtung*]" rather than a mechanical-technical apparatus. But, we are not legitimated in speaking of language as an independent and substantialized organism, in that language is "essentially" an "expression of the thinking spirit" and thus withdraws from the parameters of naturalistic understanding. For if, as Becker does in his mistaken reading of Humboldt, we reduce language as a function of thinking and the activity of thinking itself to the status of a "mere organic activity" then we commit a "dangerous error", that is, we surrender ourselves to a "crass materialism".

Heyse calls for a sparing use of the concept of the organism. He is referring to contemporary endeavours to mix all differences hastily and uncritically into one perspective and to tag this perspective with the stamp of the natural. Such endeavours are especially dangerous in an analysis of human activity because they do not lead to the recognition of cultural differences. That is why language, as the pre-eminent function of human self-activity, must be removed from the natural context. "Language originates just there where the spiritual essence of the human raises itself from the natural determinateness of organic being to

⁴⁶ Steinthal, *Grammatik, Logik und Psychologie und ihr Verhältnis zueinander*, "Erster Theil: Die logische Grammatik", pp. 1–136. See Kucharczik, *Der Organismusbegriff in der Sprachwissenschaft des 19. Jahrhunderts*, p. 235 on "Steinthal's critical polemic".

⁴⁷ Steinthal, *Grammatik, Logik und Psychologie und ihr Verhältnis zueinander*, p. 7.

the free self-determination of spiritual activity, thus standing not inside the organism but above it.”⁴⁸

Appealing to Heyse, Steinthal vehemently defends Humboldt against Becker’s reading. In his view, it is mistaken to designate an object or an event as organic whenever it does not spring from human activity. It does not make immediate sense to carry out a division of nature and culture on this foundation – on the difference between organic, i.e., natural processes and inorganic, i.e., human activity, because there is a wealth of examples, as seen in agriculture where “as is evident on many accounts culture first of all creates nature”.⁴⁹

Steinthal’s critique leads to the following fundamental idea. Because Becker cannot conceive human auturgy as organic, that is, springing with inner necessity from out of the essence of the human, he also cannot think human freedom. Paradoxically Becker’s strategy of understanding the entire life-process as “organism” leads to the result that he merely recognises a mechanism where he encounters the peculiar human auturgy and its linguistic articulation. If everything that is and has become is only the expression of a life-force, then the whole is an organism and, thus regarded, a total mechanism. Seen in this way, auturgy would only be an illusion because it is part of a determined totality of events.

According to Steinthal, Becker can neither think freedom, nor diversity, nor individuality. Thus “the rest of Becker’s exposition [...] loses its value for us”.⁵⁰ Everything in Becker’s conception of an immanent natural teleology is based on illusion and distortion. What is merely “dark” in Humboldt’s portrayal is in no way clarified by Becker but depicted in a warped fashion and is thus simply “false”.⁵¹ Steinthal fights for the Humboldtian tradition with a sharp blade.

In the debate about the legitimate legacy of Humboldt’s theory of language what is at stake is the distinction between a false and a correct reading of Humboldt.⁵² Because Humboldt’s account is unclear, both readings are possible but only one seems to be legitimate. But what does Humboldt’s erratic talk of the “organism of language” mean?

Steinthal provides a rival interpretation. In his view, language in Humboldt’s sense originates from the depths of humanity. It is a living creation [*Schöpfung*] from out of itself. The essence of language is not merely in the interior but in the penetrating of the interior into sound. “This penetration”, writes Steinthal, “is the

⁴⁸ See Heyse, *System der Sprachwissenschaft*, pp. 60–61 for the cited passage.

⁴⁹ Steinthal, *Grammatik, Logik und Psychologie und ihr Verhältnis zueinander*, p. 7.

⁵⁰ Steinthal, *Grammatik, Logik und Psychologie und ihr Verhältnis zueinander*, p. 9.

⁵¹ Steinthal, *Grammatik, Logik und Psychologie und ihr Verhältnis zueinander*, pp. 15 ff.

⁵² Compare for background Manfred Ringmacher’s *Organismus der Sprachidee. H. Steinthals Weg von Humboldt zu Humboldt*.

synthesis of language.”⁵³ Accordingly for Humboldt organic does not merely mean the material element of language but the purposefully created combination of linguistic elements, thus sound, in the service of language. The linguistic system of sounds is organic, but is not thereby to be understood mechanically – and this interpretation alone legitimates the comparison of language with an organic body. This implies a critical reservation against the Romantic philosophy of nature and an attempt to remove Humboldt’s work from this context.⁵⁴ Whoever does not move beyond that point misses, as Steinthal emphasizes,

Humboldt’s essential insight. [...] For Humboldt does not take language to be something resting or fixed, as a living organ, it is a spiritual organ, that means that as often as one wants to make use of it, it itself must be first created within the activity in which it participates; and yet on the other hand, there must always be an organ that is thus given. That is precisely the contradiction that the metaphysics of language has to explain and to resolve.⁵⁵

Summarizing Steinthal’s argument, we arrive at the following conclusion: The physics and physiology of language miss the dual aspect of language, that it is simultaneously activity and the structure of the activity, a moment in the life-process and also its logical structure. Moving against the romantic theory, Steinthal advocates an integration of the fundamental idea of Hegelian logic in Humboldt’s linguistic theory. So understood, it is Humboldt’s merit to have removed language from the domain of the natural-mechanical and to have transferred it into the region of the spiritual-processual. Thus he brings about “the rise of a new linguistics” that is to be founded on a metaphysics of language.⁵⁶ It is true that Humboldt preserves the concept of the organic in an unclear sense for the description of spiritual-processual elements of human speech, which is a realization of the capacity to think in the infinite abundance of its forms of expression. But with this, only its functionality is addressed – without any element of substantialization. In dealing with Humboldt it is thus important to extrapolate a concise and clear application of the discourse of the organic character of human language.

Steinthal emphasizes that “organic” can only refer to the efficacy of the inner linguistic form and this efficacy implies three features: first, the activity

53 Steinthal, *Grammatik, Logik und Psychologie und ihr Verhältnis zueinander*, p. 127.

54 See Steinthal, *Grammatik, Logik und Psychologie und ihr Verhältnis zueinander*, p. 129: “Organism, organ is thus for Humboldt, when applied to language, merely an illustrative image, without ingenuity [*Geistreichigkeit*] as in Becker and elsewhere [*sonst vielfach*] and without mysticism as in Friedrich Schlegel.”

55 Steinthal, *Grammatik, Logik und Psychologie und ihr Verhältnis zueinander*, p. 129.

56 Steinthal, *Grammatik, Logik und Psychologie und ihr Verhältnis zueinander*, p. 132.

of thinking externalizes and realizes itself with necessity as language; second, the interweaving of activity (speaking) and structure (objective forms of language) only succeeds in living speech; and third, “diversity in the construction of languages” results from the processual success, which always recurs in speaking anew. This manifoldness is not, as it is with Becker, asserted to be inessential with respect to a natural constitution of language as unity. It is rather the essential moment in which language so appears and founds, so to speak, the central anthropological thesis of his linguistic theory.⁵⁷

1.3 Anthropology and Linguistics

The path from Humboldt to Steinthal leads from Humboldt’s supposition concerning the ground of linguistic diversity to Steinthal’s uncovering of its anthropological content. That is what Steinthal means with the emphasis on “Humboldt’s genuine achievement” and the subsequent argument for this.⁵⁸ The world encountered by humans is always already a world interpreted through a previous production of sense in language. The world interpreted in language is multi-faceted. This variety, however, is not in retrospect a deficit in regard to the singular origin of language, nor in regard to a structural linguistic unity that is naturally caused. Steinthal moves the study of linguistic diversity to the centre of linguistic research and is guided by the perspective of individual languages. He understands this as the world-historical standpoint of his present, a present that has a positive interest in the development of different forms of life and language. He takes the inner form of language – and the three aforementioned aspects – as the principle of explanation for linguistic diversity. There is no consensus as to whether this is the right way of reading the enigmatic and obscure Humboldt passages.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, this question very clearly illustrates the dispute inaugurated by Steinthal concerning the legacy of Humboldt, a person who is either taken to be a mysterious romantic or a modern linguistic researcher.

In a cultural-theoretical regard what is additionally at stake is the determining of a direction that will dominate the 19th and the 20th century. Standing be-

⁵⁷ Steinthal, *Grammatik, Logik und Psychologie und ihr Verhältnis zueinander*, p. 134.

⁵⁸ Compare Trabant, “Ideelle Bezeichnung. Steinthals Humboldt-Kritik”, p. 258.

⁵⁹ See Di Cesare, “‘Innere Sprachform’. Humboldts Grenzbegriff, Steinthals Begriffsgrenze”, p. 338–339. Steinthal also admits that Humboldt’s concept of inner linguistic form is “deep” although the latter does not understand the problem of the diversity of languages. Steinthal, *Charakteristik der Hauptsächlichsten Typen des Sprachbaues*, pp. 40–44.

hind the search for a unity of language and for a common origin of all language is the wish for a reduction of cultural variety. Old myths and new legends are employed to conceal an anti-modern mindset. The literary critic George Steiner found an enduring formula for this constellation:

A language fills a niche in the honeycomb of potential perceptions and interpretations. It articulates a construct of values, interpretations, assumptions that no other language repeats exactly or replaces. Because our species has spoken and speaks in various different languages, it brings forth an abundance of environments and adapts itself to them. We speak worlds. Thus Babel was the opposite of a curse.⁶⁰

Steinthal is one of the first thinkers, alongside Humboldt, who welcomes the abundance of manifold languages and cultures. This attitude, as is well-known, excited controversy in the following two centuries.

The gist of Steinthal's linguistic theory lies precisely in its destruction of a representation that was predominant in the Christian influenced Occident, namely that of the unity of language at a common origin, anchored in the legend of the Babylonian curse of language.⁶¹ Steinthal directs our attention towards the open future of linguistic and cultural development whose guarantee is given in the irreconcilable variety of languages. Aside from this wide-ranging implication, we have yet to examine what Steinthal works out in detail in his reading of Humboldt. He describes the inner form of language as the way in which "instinctive self-consciousness [...] appropriates intuitions and transposes [them] into ideas".⁶² With instinctive self-consciousness and the inner form of language we have uncovered the basic form of the processual interrelationships from which all anthropological difference derives. Instinctive self-consciousness and the inner form of language are simultaneously both identical and different. This refers to a radical subjectivity that is, however, unthinkable without the urge to an interiorization of the objective and an externalization of interiority. Steinthal speaks of the process of "objectification" in the inner form of language that allows a diversity in the respective external linguistic forms.

To speak of the diversity of languages thus means "that every language is to be regarded as an intuition of the outer and inner world of humanity formed by instinctive self-consciousness".⁶³ This fundamental idea determines Steinthal's great project, to draw up a *classification of languages*. To this end it is necessary

60 Steiner, *Errata*, p. 119.

61 See Wolf Peter Klein for the intellectual historical background to this: *Am Anfang war das Wort*.

62 Steinthal, *Grammatik, Logik und Psychologie und ihr Verhältnis zueinander*, p. 375.

63 Steinthal, *Grammatik, Logik und Psychologie und ihr Verhältnis zueinander*, p. 379.

to depict each particular language as an individual actualization (understood here as a process) of the concept of language and to show the concept of a unity of languages as an idea that is inscribed in a processual and developmental sequence of occurrences. Without the idea of a unity of languages, historical contexts cannot be depicted. For Steinthal, it is only in this functional sense that the idea of unity is the presupposition of a processual event – and this is thought of in a good Hegelian fashion. In his work *Characteristic of the Main Types of Linguistic Construction* [*Charakteristik der Hauptsächlichsten Typen des Sprachbaues*] (Berlin 1860), Steinthal explicates his hypothesis that the diversity of languages and their determination towards unity is a question of classification and, here as well, the terms 'classification', 'type', 'instinct' are not to be understood naturalistically.

In later years Steinthal merges his critical discussion of other works and his own attempt at a redefinition of the theory of language in his *Introduction to Psychology and Linguistics* [*Einleitung in die Psychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*] (1881).⁶⁴ His answer to the question concerning the origin of language is concise. This question had captivated the scholarly world from Herder's treatise from the middle of the 18th century down to Jacob Grimm's studies a hundred years later. Steinthal inverts the direction of questioning and explains the origin of language in terms of its being a process: the origin of language lies in its continually arising, in its simple activity. Language "is what it is becoming; that means its definition lies in its development".⁶⁵

Borrowing a phrase from Goethe, he reclaims an aspect in the human which did not enter from the outside. This interior is also not to be misunderstood as 'instinct' in a naturalistic sense. The diversity of languages does not stem from a diversity of the instincts found among their respective peoples. Thus, on Steinthal's view, the Semitic race does not have a monotheistic instinct.⁶⁶ The problem of the generation of language [*Spracherzeugung*] cannot be handled appropriately in reductionist theories or their one-sided, ideology-laden exaggerations.

The history of [an] invention [*Erfindung*] is really understood only when one conceives its state of mind and can in a sense derive the invention and its course from this. [...] For us that also means that to research the origin of language is nothing other than to get to know the mental formation which precedes the generation of language, to understand a state and

⁶⁴ Steinthal, *Einleitung in die Psychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*.

⁶⁵ Steinthal, *Einleitung in die Psychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*, p. 74.

⁶⁶ Steinthal, *Einleitung in die Psychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*, p. 77. For the continuation of this debate see Sigmund Freud's work *Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion*.

certain conditions of consciousness as conditions under which language must break forth and then to learn what spirit wins through it and how it continues to develop lawfully.⁶⁷

This itself is not yet a sufficient answer to the formulated problem but rather the indication of a research programme.

1.4 Language as Generation in the Spirit

The linguistic theorist Steinthal seeks an alternative to the – in modern terms – naturalistic and constructivist description of the emergence of language. Language is “not an invention but an arising of, or generation in, spirit [*eine Erzeugung im Geiste*]”. Language has become, without being willed. Influenced by Darwinian theory, Steinthal too defines language as a product of nature.⁶⁸ However he refuses, despite of all proximity to the natural sciences, to engage in naturalistic reduction and remains committed to the autonomy of spiritual formation.

Language is thus a birth, an emanation from consciousness, a developmental stage of the spirit, which arrives with necessity when mental formation has reached a certain point. However, it originates from the soul of humanity in the same way at all times and will always be conceived and born in the same way in consciousness.⁶⁹

The uniformity of language formation points back to a shared origin of all human activity in consciousness as the moment of individuation and in the soul as the moment of participation in the process of inter-human events. This is a paradox Hegel already thought. Although the human spirit is not a substance that precedes mental activity, it amounts to a category error to reduce mental activity to the materiality of the being-active. “Language is not a thing, a powder, but an event, like an explosion; it is not an organ, such as the eye or ear, but a capacity and activity, such as seeing and hearing. So it was and so it is at all times.”⁷⁰

67 Steinthal, *Einleitung in die Psychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*, p. 85.

68 Steinthal, *Einleitung in die Psychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*, p. 82: “Language is thus [...] according the way of origination, to be considered as a creation of nature, a growing organism.”

69 Steinthal, *Einleitung in die Psychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*, p. 85.

70 Steinthal, *Einleitung in die Psychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*, p. 85. And he adds on p. 86: “Its whole essence lies in its origin; because it is its essence to be always arising anew. It does not have a single origin in ancient times but as often as it appears, it establishes its origin.”

Language is an event. In its active occurring, an irreducible moment of individuality lies in everyday language. Steinthal does not go so far as to inquire into individual speech in its event structure and to describe it in its singularity. For him what is most important is the determination of the individuality of speech and of the speaker as well as of the diversity of languages that results from this.

For Steinthal, being human means allowing the physiological core of freedom that we find on all levels of conscious life and experience of the soul, as well as already in animals, to take shape in an individual form of language. This process has individual-historical effects, but it also has a cultural-historical side. In the emergence of individual forms of language, it is revealed that humanity is what it will be. "Steinthal's theory of language is an anthropology"⁷¹ – and in the sense that it conceives the mystery of humanity, the individual life and experience [*Erleben*], as an unanticipatable event that is not determined through its place of origin. Its anthropological implications make Steinthal's theory of language a vehement protest against the tendencies of his time, tendencies that conceptualize humanity primarily as a species only to then register it as the sum of natural or historical processes.⁷²

71 See Hartwig Wiedebach's "Zu Steinthals Theorie vom Ursprung der Sprache und des jüdischen Monotheismus", p. 104.

72 See Wilhelm Windelband's *Die Philosophie im deutschen Geistesleben des 19. Jahrhunderts*, especially Chapter IV, pp. 72–95, in which the tendency to subsume the individual under the aspect of the general in society and the sciences is presented as the signature of the late 19th century.

2 The Origin of Language from ‘Almost Nothing’ – Lazarus Geiger

That nothing human will be strange to us
[...] Is well explained as what is at issue
Everywhere in language is a wonderful product
In which nature and spirit are unified
And nature has become spirit.
(Lazarus Geiger)¹

In the hundred-year-period between 1750 and 1850, the question concerning the origin of language impacted a debate in which questions of ideology as well as those of science were at stake. Heymann Steinthal’s hypothesis that language does not have a singular origin in ancient times but originates at every time that it appears indicates, in his undertaking, that language escapes definition through either the materiality of nature or of history. However, in this debate there are both partisans and opponents as well as a clear line where confrontation occurs. In addition, the expansion of the linguistic-theoretical problematic to the wider field of research in anthropology and cultural history has potentially explosive consequences. There is a lot at stake, which explains the polemic (and not only on the part of Steinthal) of the great polemicists on their own behalf.

The debate concerning the origin and development of language also has wider repercussions in the second half of the 19th century. Friedrich Max Müller, the researcher into Sanskrit and, from 1868, the holder of the newly founded Chair for Comparative Religion at Oxford University, is never at a loss for clear words on this issue.² Evolutionary theory is for him the measure of the scientific [*Wissenschaftlichkeit*] in linguistic research. “It is totally incomprehensible to me how a linguist can be anything other than an adherent of evolutionary theory.”³ However, to believe that Müller buys into Darwin’s theory without reservation would be very mistaken. For Müller is an ardent adherent of Kant and Goethe. He claims that it is to them above all, and not the botanist Darwin, to whom we are indebted for essential insights concerning the structure and lawfulness

1 Geiger, *Ursprung und Entwicklung der menschlichen Sprache und Vernunft*, Vol. 1, p. XI.

2 On Müller’s significance see Kippenberg, *Die Entdeckung der Religionsgeschichte*, p. 60–79. On Sanskrit research in a narrower sense, see Klaus Grotzsch’s “Das Sanskrit und die Ursprache. Zur Rolle des Sanskrit in der Konstitutionsphase der historisch-vergleichenden Sprachwissenschaft”. See the comprehensive study by Lourens P. van den Bosch, *Friedrich Max Müller – A Life Devoted to the Humanities*.

3 Müller, *Das Denken im Lichte der Sprache*, p. 81.

of natural evolution. In the thoroughly bizarre debate about Darwin’s theory that was enacted in the second half of the 19th century in the United Kingdom and Germanic countries, Müller’s position is ironic and pointed – and it strikes at a decisive issue.

There is no doubt that the publication of Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* (1859) was a scientific-historical event. However, both before and after this event, others had studied evolutionary history – and on very different lines to those laid out by Darwin. This point must be emphasized repeatedly so as to avoid over-simplistic depictions. While the public was overwhelmed by a book that is full of “illuminating empiricism”, as Trendelenburg describes it,⁴ the representatives of philosophy and the sciences in Germany had been well prepared for Darwin’s theory.

For Müller, it is knowledge of Kantian philosophy that guards against the enthusiasm for the recent evolutionary theorist. Schopenhauer had already brought Kant into play against the representatives of an ‘absolute physics’. He emphasized over and over again that there is no path from the description of causal relationships to the explanation of why these relationships so constitute themselves to us and not otherwise. Anyone who takes seriously Kant’s distinctions between thing-in-itself and appearance, between necessity and freedom and his critically refined teleological power of judgment can hardly be expected to take pleasure in “today’s fashionable materialism”, this “philosophy of assistant barbers and chemist’s apprentices” that naively holds all natural events to be objective.⁵ Schopenhauer had already, before Darwin’s sensational book was published, diagnosed his time as suffering from anti-teleological affect which, especially in England in his opinion, can be traced back to an insufficient liberation from theological tutelage and a shocking ignorance of Kantian philosophy.⁶

A few years afterwards, this debate was formulated as “Kant or Darwin?” and was first fought inside what was then simply termed science, before the battle lines were drawn between the human and the natural sciences.⁷ The debate had two main implications. On the one hand, it forced the differentiation of linguistics under the guidance of a methodological disputes (concerning the prin-

⁴ Trendelenburg, *Logische Untersuchungen*, Vol. 2, p. 79: “Since this book an illuminating [*lichtvoller*] empiricism in Germany has pursued its metaphysical consequences, the victory of efficient causality is celebrated and the concept of purpose is wiped from the world or abandoned to human poetry.”

⁵ Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, here Vol. 2, Book 1, Chapter 17, p. 196.

⁶ See Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, Vol. 1., p. 386.

⁷ See Hartung, “Darwin und die Philosophen. Eine Studie zur Darwin-Rezeption im 19. Jahrhundert”.

principle of pure observation, the field of application for the category of causality together with a remarkable “teleo-phobia” (Karl Ernst von Baer⁸) and the institutionalization of this new discipline which sought to emancipate itself from philosophy and philology as well as to establish itself as a natural science.⁹ On the other hand, as result of its self-stylization as a theory of pure observation, it led to a situation of epistemological naivety in which the facts of natural observation were collected, arbitrarily classified but not mastered. As a result, linguistics oriented itself using the paradigm of a scientific practice of botany which revelled in the abundance of organic forms that were discovered – it “practically drowned in the positive historical facts”.¹⁰

2.1 Darwin and Linguistics

Yet, in spite of some isolated cases of reservation, Darwin’s theory was the measure for the scientific in the 1860s, especially in the young discipline of linguistics. August Schleicher, who took on a central position in this period as both the founder of comparative linguistic research and the forerunner of so called Indo-Germanic studies,¹¹ strove enthusiastically for the separation of philology and linguistics as well as for the closer alignment of the latter to the scientific standards of his time. His *Open Letter to Ernst Haeckel [Offenes Sendschreiben an Ernst Haeckel]*, the leading representative of German Darwinism, is programmatic in this context. This work was published as *Darwinian Theory and Linguistics [Die Darwinsche Theorie und die Sprachwissenschaft]* in Weimar in 1863.

For Schleicher, the conflict between Kant and Darwin was long since decided in favour of Darwin.

The course of thinking in modern times runs unmistakably to monism. Dualism, whether one understands it as the opposition of spirit and nature, content and form, essence and

8 Baer, “Ueber den Zweck in den Vorgängen der Natur”, p. 72. It is necessary for him, as he said, “to express the conviction that the anxiety of the natural researcher before purposes or better goals – this teleophobia, as it could be called – seems to me to emerge from conceptual confusion”.

9 See Lang, “Ursprache und Sprachnation. Sprachursprungsmotive in der deutschen Sprachwissenschaft des 19. Jahrhunderts”.

10 See Trabant, *Europäisches Sprachdenken*, p. 295.

11 See August Schleicher, *Sprachvergleichende Untersuchungen*, Vol. 1: *Zur vergleichenden Sprachengeschichte*; also his *Linguistische Untersuchungen*, Vol. 2: *Die Sprachen Europas in systematischer Uebersicht*.

appearance or whatever one may call it is, for the natural-scientific view of our times, a standpoint that has been completely surmounted.¹²

Schleicher calls upon philosophy to devise a “philosophical system of monism”. This demand is neither plucked from the air nor is it presumptuous: the enormous power of the observational sciences demanded a repositioning of philosophy, and with it, of linguistics.

According to Max Müller, “no linguist [can ...] be anything other than an evolutionist; for, wherever he looks, he sees nothing but development around him”.¹³ In realizing his programme, Schleicher himself cares little about epistemological caveats and in this respect proves Schopenhauer’s harsh critique of fashionable materialism true. To him everything “construed *a priori* [seems] worthless junk”. An effective observational science, in his opinion, requires no more than a theory “that seeks nothing behind things but holds the thing to be identical with its appearance”.¹⁴

The observational natural sciences yield to the factual evidence. New standards were set by the discoveries of the geologist Charles Lyell on the pre-historic development of our planet, discoveries which required a recalculation of the age of the earth and which pushed all creation narratives [*Schöpfungsgeschichten*] into the domain of myth and, in turn, by the insights of Darwin, into the history of life. The natural-scientific descriptive paradigm for life on earth in its diversity and evolution seemingly necessitates no further explanation. “Darwin’s theory is a necessity” as the linguist Schleicher said and it presents the decisive clue for the resolution of all “enigmas of the world [*Welträtsel*]”, as his colleague from Jena, Ernst Haeckel added.¹⁵ The idea of evolution and the notion that the same lawfulness underlies natural and cultural processes is central to their considerations. Thus Darwin’s theory provides the foundation for a theory of nature and culture. In his *Natural History of Creation* [*Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte*] (1868) Haeckel bluntly states that, post-Darwin, the history of life on earth can no longer be considered as before because “evolution is from henceforth the

12 Schleicher, *Die Darwinsche Theorie und die Sprachwissenschaft*, p. 8.

13 Müller, *Das Denken im Lichte der Sprache*, “Vorrede”, p. VIII.

14 Schleicher, *Die Darwinsche Theorie und die Sprachwissenschaft*, p. 9. This assumption has direct consequences for research into language, on this see his *Über die Bedeutung der Sprache für die Naturgeschichte des Menschen*, p. 10: “language and its underlying material conditions relate to each other as cause and effect, as being and appearance in general; the philosopher would say: they are identical. We therefore consider it right to consider language almost as something materially existing.”

15 See Haeckel, *Die Welträtsel*.

magic word through which we can solve all the enigmas that surround us or at least bring them to the path to their resolution".¹⁶

According to Haeckel, it is high time to make the universal theory of evolution in *The Origin of the Species* fruitful for a metatheory of the sciences. It is in this sense that August Schleicher also endeavoured to apply Darwin's model to the history of language. This project implies that languages be considered as living "organisms". "That which Darwin maintained of the species of animals and plants is now also maintained, at least with regard to its principal features, of the organisms of languages."¹⁷ This claim to an analogy [*Die Analogieführung*] between research into language and nature became resolutely implemented. Thus glottology dealt with language families or genera, with languages or varieties, dialectics or sub-varieties acoustic phenomena or organisms and with the roots of language or cells. Research into nature and language came to mutually ensure the universal applicability of their principles: the diversity of languages (which Schleicher summarized in a compendium¹⁸) corresponded to the abundance of species in nature that had so astounded Darwin in his voyages to the South Seas and had made him doubt the constancy of species; these species, as it were, confirming the principle of variability in natural history. Further, the claim that all life descends from an original form supported the assumption of a basic linguistic form – which for Schleicher is the Indo-Germanic Ur-language.¹⁹ And the natural history of life gives reason for understanding the history of language under the aspect of the "struggle for existence".

2.2 The Origin of Languages in the Light of Darwin's Theory

According to Schleicher the linguistic researcher even has an advantage as compared to the researcher into nature: for the former it is possible, on the basis of the temporal compression of the observed material (for the history of language is only a short episode in natural history and the one which is closest to us) to carry out an exact description of the developmental process (for example on the level of phonetic shifts), which possibility is denied to the researcher into nature. Darwin's "long argument", so to speak, finds here, on a short span, its confirmation to the highest degree. Schleicher, exhilarated by these consequences, turns to the oldest problem of research in linguistics: the question concerning

16 Haeckel, "Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte. 1. Teil. Vorwort zur 1. Auflage (1868)", p. 4.

17 Schleicher, *Die Darwinsche Theorie und die Sprachwissenschaft*, p. 11.

18 See Schleicher, *Compendium der Vergleichenden Grammatik der Indogermanischen Sprachen*.

19 See Schleicher, *Die Darwinsche Theorie und die Sprachwissenschaft*, pp. 13–14.

the origin of language. He deals with the old hypothesis of Leibnizian coinage with a stroke of a pen. On his view it is impossible to materially prove the descent of all languages from a single original language. Any comparative element in the fundamental Indo-Germanic and Semitic languages is lacking for this assumption.

We assume an origin for all languages that is formally the same. As human beings made their way from noisy gestures [*Lautgebärden*] and imitations of sounds [*Schallnachahmungen*] to significant sounds [*Bedeutungslauten*], these latter were only just meaningful sounds, simple phonetic forms without grammatical relation. The sound-material [*Lautmateriale*], however, of which they consist and the significance they express, these simplest beginnings of language were different for different peoples: the diversity of languages that have developed from such beginnings testifies to this. For this reason, we presuppose a countless amount of original languages but we state that there is one and the same form for them all.²⁰

These considerations are neither based on observation nor are they culturally and theoretically innocent. Rather the Schleicherian developmental model must be imagined as follows: while at the beginning there was a unified linguistic form of significant sounds, we end up with differentiation into many languages. The process of differentiation lying in between must be conceived in terms of a struggle for existence. Evolution in the sense of higher development means, that strong, particularist powers win out against weaker powers. Whatever phonetic material is destroyed in this process, is rightly lost. For Schleicher, as with all supporters of the idea of evolution who spoke in the discourse of monist philosophy in the 19th century, the meaning of evolution, both naturally and culturally, simply lies in how evolution occurred.²¹

Linguistic research thus also presents itself as providing a “basis for the natural system for the genus *homo*”. Where the investigation of racial differences – for example, of the formation of the skull – is imprecise, linguistic research can provide “a totally constant characteristic”.²² Linguistic differences, especially when they are considered unbridgeable, corroborate racial differences. For

20 Schleicher, *Die Darwinsche Theorie und die Sprachwissenschaft*, p. 23.

21 See as regards this point the by far more differentiated panorama in Friedrich Nietzsche's *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, where in a “note” between the first and the second essay a question is stated which he announces for “some” philosophical faculty as an “academic competition”: “What signposts does linguistics, especially the study of etymology, give to the history of the evolution of moral concepts?”, from Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, p. 34.

22 Schleicher, *Über die Bedeutung der Sprache für die Naturgeschichte des Menschen*, p. 16. The so-called evidence reads: a German would never “innately speak a negro language” and he would also never be fully able to acquire it.

Schleicher the natural system of languages is likened to a natural system of humanity. It is language in particular that presents us with the possibility of “classifying human beings” in the field of hereditary theory.²³ Language materially produces the human and the periods of natural history give an impression of which languages, cultures and races (terms that are used synonymously) have rightly held their own. For only, Schleicher concludes, when the period of the evolution of language is completed does the period of historical life begin. Only when the differentiation into linguistic groups is carried out to the fullest extent does the struggle of these groups amongst themselves begin. Many of these “are unsuitable for historical life and for this reason henceforth are a regression, even in danger of destruction”.²⁴

2.3 Concerning the Difference between Anthropology and Linguistics

It is these extremely popular hypotheses which often circumvent the border between scientific argumentation and ideological assertion that provoked Friedrich Max Müller to respond. On Müller’s view, the absence of differentiation in fields of research in both linguistics and ethnology leads to confusion in scientific observation. “The classification of races and of language should remain completely independent of one another.”²⁵ The attempt at ethnological classification on a linguistic basis is crudely “unscientific” because a people is an “ideal unity” – “that is, it lies far more in spiritual factors, in religion and language, than the affinity and community of the blood”.²⁶

In spite of his harsh criticisms of the popular views of the linguistic and racial theorists of his time, the linguist Müller is a vehement advocate for the notion that the insights of Darwin’s theory can be transferred to linguistics.²⁷ He is also of the firm conviction that linguistics can only ever claim to be scientific in relying on the results of contemporary natural science. But he neither wants to assume all the results of Darwin’s theory nor unreservedly hand linguistics over to the jurisdiction of the natural sciences. It seems indubitable to him that lin-

²³ Schleicher, *Über die Bedeutung der Sprache für die Naturgeschichte des Menschen*, p. 18.

²⁴ Schleicher, *Über die Bedeutung der Sprache für die Naturgeschichte des Menschen*, p. 28.

²⁵ Müller, *Vorlesungen über die Wissenschaft der Sprache*, p. 278.

²⁶ Müller, *Über die Resultate der Sprachwissenschaft*, p. 17.

²⁷ Müller, *Das Denken im Lichte der Sprache*, Preface, p. VIII: “If by Darwinism evolution is meant, then I was a Darwinian long before Darwin.” See in addition Noiré, *Max Müller und die Sprachphilosophie*, pp. 14–15.

guistics belongs to the physical sciences but – as his reference to the tradition of Humboldt, Grimm and Bopp makes clear – it also stands apart from them on the basis of its close links to intellectual history.

Darwin’s hereditary theory primarily provides Müller with arguments for holding to his hypothesis that there is a common origin of the human race. For him this idea remains an essential component of his theory of culture, if also unverifiable historically and untenable as part of the myth of creation. The limits of Darwin lie at those points where he is seduced by his hereditary-hypothesis to lead all life on earth back to original “Monera” and to trace back the human back to animal precursors in the evolutionary process. What is at issue in the confrontation with Darwin is the question of what meaningful sense the concept of evolution has. It is presupposed that Darwin was right when he posited a beginning for reason and language in time, but that cannot mean, on Müller’s view, that reason and language arose from unreason and linguistic incapacity. It is here that the limits of the theory of evolution lies and it is here that Darwinian theory breaks down “because evolution means no more and no less than the transformation of hidden to readily apparent properties”.²⁸

For Müller evolution implies a polygony of lines of descent between which there are no points of intersection. Evolution takes place only within these “broad lines”. Thus whether a genus is descended from another is decided by means of the evidence, by whether all the properties that emerge in it are already actually or potentially present in the previous genus. In accordance with the dictum “*natura non facit saltus*” Müller returns to a basic principle of Aristotelian natural teleology: while no overall purpose can be maintained anymore as regards natural events there still remain good grounds for working with [*zu operieren*] the categories of potentiality, purposiveness and final causality within the lines of descent. Müller thus argues that the derivation of the human from the animal is to be rejected because “I see in language something peculiarly human, of which no trace is ever found, actually or potentially, in any other creature.”²⁹

28 Müller, *Das Denken im Licht der Sprache*, p. 81.

29 Müller, *Das Denken im Licht der Sprache*, p. 86. On the question of the reciprocal dependence of thinking and language, see Joan Leopold’s “Anthropological Perspectives on the Origin of Language Debate in the Nineteenth Century: Edward B. Tylor and Charles Darwin”, especially p. 170: “Whether naming (language) was necessary for thought or for higher and more complicated levels of thought was a question hotly debated, particularly because Max Müller had recently stated that there was no thought without language [...] Darwin took a middle position. He felt [...] that thought existed prior to the development of articulate language, but that articulate language was necessary for advanced thought processes to become common.”

Basically the linguist taps the nerve of Darwinian theory here.³⁰ He at the same time expresses his hope of also being able to convert Darwin to Kantianism.³¹ Müller's Kantianized Aristotelianism leads him back to old certainties. He thus transposes the Kantian *a priori* into the history of life and anchors it in an inscrutable and exclusively human potentiality, that is the capacity for spiritualization [*Vergeistigung*] and language. In this way, the descent of the human from the animal is excluded, the idea of evolution banished, and a secret teleology of natural forces in Goethe's sense is revived.³²

Müller's argument has a Janus-face. On the one hand it marks a relapse into the pre-Darwinian. In the light of empirical research into nature, a secret teleology of natural forces seems like an echo of the Romantic idealization of nature. On the other hand, the linguist uncovers the anthropological core of the debate and appraises its cost. If Darwin's theory is taken seriously, then the boundaries between the human and the animal must be torn down. This itself, however, contradicts the very data of natural observation itself, which latter is raised to the highest principle of knowledge by the natural sciences. For we stand before the discovery that "language [is ...] one of humanity's peculiar abilities [and] distinguishes it from all other creatures".³³ Research into nature does indeed teach us that some of the higher animals have the physical requirements for articulate speech but do not make use of them. Wherein then lies the difference if not in cognitive capacities, Müller concludes.

Müller's summary the difference between the human and the animal culminates in the famous dictum of the "Rubicon" that will not be crossed. "I answer without hesitation: the only high boundary between the animal and the human is language. Humanity speaks, but no animal has ever brought forth a word. Lan-

30 Darwin had also seen this. See Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, Chapter 3, the comparison between human mental powers and those of the lower animals, p. 89–95. His conclusion, p. 94–95, reads: "From these few and imperfect remarks I conclude that [...] the faculty of articulate speech in itself does not offer any insuperable objection to the belief that man has been developed from some lower form." Wilhelm Wundt sees this also and says in his *Vorlesungen über Menschen- und Tierseele*, Vol. 1, p. 458 that: "All cognitive differences are only differences of degree, not of kind."

31 This is perhaps also the intention of his translation of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that was published in London in 1881. See Müller, *Das Denken im Lichte der Sprache*, p. 140: "My belief in Darwin's intellectual honesty is so strong that I would not be surprised if he would have given up his theory of the descent of the human from apes or one of the higher animal genera after he would have become familiar with Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*."

32 See Breidbach (ed.), *Goethes Naturverständnis*.

33 Müller, *Vorlesungen über die Wissenschaft der Sprache*, p. 297.

guage is our Rubicon and no animal will venture to cross it.”³⁴ This is said with great pathos, owing to his conviction that it is to the field of linguistics that the decision has fallen concerning the determination of the human as a being of nature and which alone has cognitive capacities. When it comes to decisiveness Müller is in no way inferior to his adversary Schleicher.

Another of Müller’s statements is of almost prophetic character in the light of more recent debates. “I am convinced that linguistics alone has put us in a position to call a decisive ‘Halt!’ to Darwinian evolutionary theory and to firmly draw the line which separates spirit from matter, the human from the animal.”³⁵ His Kantianizing Aristotelianism leads him to speculate about the origin of humanity, in which he finds the inherent potential of what he develops as the specific difference of humankind through natural evolution. This process can be understood throughout (at least hypothetically) as the emergence of the human from an original unity which developed in the direction of a diversity of languages and cultures. It is not, however, diversity alone that interests Müller. His gaze is decisively fixed on the unity of humanity in a mythical origin.³⁶

2.4 On the Development of Language from ‘almost nothing’

We see here the opening of a historical and theoretical problematic in which Lazarus Geiger’s contributions to linguistic thought plays a great role. Despite his short life and few publications, he counts among the most distinguished linguists of the late 19th century.³⁷ Geiger worked as a Professor at the Jewish University in Frankfurt and wrote essays on the theory of language, one of which was published in English translation. The list of those scholars who explicitly refer to Geiger’s research is long. They extend from Max Müller’s comment that “linguistic philosophy owes much” to him,³⁸ through the representatives

34 Müller, *Vorlesungen über die Wissenschaft der Sprache*, p. 303.

35 Müller, *Über die Resultate der Sprachwissenschaft*, pp. 28–29.

36 Müller, *Vorlesungen über die Wissenschaft der Sprache*, p. 337: “We are not merely capable of grasping how language originated but also how one language must be dissolved into many and we perceive that the great manifold in the material and formal elements of language is not irreconcilable with the assumption of a common origin.” See Kippenberg, *Die Entdeckung der Religionsgeschichte*, p. 61: “Inspired by its [the Romantic tradition’s] conception of an underived Ur-history, Müller’s interest was wholly and completely [*ganz und gar*] directed towards the beginning. Like all those who have the evolution of humanity as their theme, he is preoccupied with the gradual growth of the human spirit.”

37 See Rosenthal, *Lazarus Geiger*.

38 See Müller, *Das Denken im Lichte der Sprache*, p. 78.

of monist philosophy³⁹ and social psychology [*Völkerpsychologie*] (Wilhelm Wundt)⁴⁰ down to Ernst Cassirer and Arnold Gehlen.⁴¹ Yet he has remained the great unknown in 19th century linguistics.

Geiger's intellectual background is shaped by the German-Jewish intellectual tradition that was passed on to him in his parents' house and through his reading of Moses Mendelssohn's writings. His biographer surmises that it was especially in the analysis of Mendelssohn that "he may have won the conviction that the conscientious thinker could not enter into contradiction with the paternal faith".⁴² This view may have actually guided his researches but there is no direct evidence for it whatsoever. At first glance Geiger appears to be a simple eclectic when, next to Wilhelm von Humboldt, Heymann Steinthal and August Friedrich Pott, he also refers to August Schleicher and Max Müller. But it is clear on a second glance that in addition to working through of these inspirations, he also developed an independent approach to his research.

A brief look back at Steinthal's writings, this time under a different aspect, is necessary so as to understand the point of Geiger's considerations. Steinthal had dominated the reception of Humboldt from his early treatise *Wilhelm v. Humboldt's Linguistic Philosophy and Hegelian Philosophy* [*Die Sprachphilosophie Wilhelm v. Humboldts und die Hegel'sche Philosophie*] (Berlin 1848) and the edition he arranged of *Wilhelm v. Humboldt's Linguistic-Philosophical Works* [*Die sprachphilosophischen Werke Wilhelm von Humboldts*] (Berlin 1884). He is "the first and most important Humboldt commentator of the 19th century".⁴³ Steinthal's position is distinguished by his steadfast refusal to hand linguistics over to natural science in the terms defined by Schleicher. "I have long disapproved of this analogizing of linguistics with natural science."⁴⁴ However, this thought is misleading for it does not actually imply a recourse to traditional ways of thinking but is rather an appeal to follow the naturalization of the human spirit – and inversely the spiritualization of human nature – through to the end. The human is by na-

39 See Noiré, *Der monistische Gedanke*; Noiré, *Die Welt als Entwicklung des Geistes*, pp. 244 ff.; Reichenau, *Die monistische Philosophie von Spinoza bis auf unsere Tage* (Chapter 7: "Lazar Geiger"), pp. 155–181.

40 The meaning of Geiger's conception is visible even in Wilhelm Wundt's rejection, see Wundt, *Völkerpsychologie*, Vol. 2: *Die Sprache*, Part 2, pp. 624–628.

41 See Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, Vol. 1, pp. 257–260; Gehlen, *Der Mensch*, pp. 194–195.

42 See Rosenthal, *Lazarus Geiger*, p. 131. See especially pp. 153 ff. on the "position of Lazar Geiger with regard to the faith of his forefathers".

43 See Trabant, "Ideelle Bezeichnung. Steinthals Humboldt-Kritik", p. 261; Trabant, *Traditionen Humboldts*, pp. 60–63.

44 Steinthal, "Offenes Sendschreiben an Herrn Professor Pott (1852)", p. 144.

ture already more than animal; for in its nature in itself there is the predisposition to spiritualization; spirit belongs to its nature.⁴⁵

What is stated here is of great consequence. It concerns the idea that the “predisposition to spiritualization” belongs to human nature. What is spoken of is the human insofar as it is always already and by nature a cultural being.⁴⁶ Thus the question of the origin is taken out of general natural history and transposed to the ontogenesis of the human. In keeping with Humboldt, Steinthal insists that the concept of “natural history” is misleading because it describes mere sequences of events in nature but does not think in terms of development. Nature teaches us nothing concerning us as human but only as animal; that is, however, the region of “natural history”. What distinguishes us as human can only originate in us ourselves. It is the domain of the history of humanity that matters here.

Steinthal had referred to Humboldt all his life and thinks through his work further by way of commentary. His starting point with regard Humboldt is the notion of the “internal linguistic form” inasmuch as he only speaks of the origin of language in a transcendental-philosophical regard. “That means we cannot speak of the temporal beginning of language but rather of its ‘eternal’ springing, of that which happens every time we speak.”⁴⁷ In Humboldt’s words, language is understood as “the formative organ of thought” or “the eternally repeated work of the spirit, that makes articulated sounds capable of the expression of thought”.⁴⁸

Regardless of how Humboldt had positioned himself, Steinthal comes to a startling result: “H[umboldt]’s view is Kantianized Spinozism.”⁴⁹ He integrates three main points of view by means of this attribution: first, Humboldt had understood the identity of language and the human spirit; secondly, for him, it comes back to the empirical discovery that every language has an individual form for in the end every individual has their own language. And thirdly, on the one hand, language is the binding and, on the other hand, the individuating principle for it binds the individuals to one another and to a living power as the principle of all movement and at the same time it steps this living power in the

45 Steinthal and Lazarus, “Einleitende Gedanken über Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft”, p. 319.

46 This “by nature” is, in its total ambiguity, the ground on which 20th century philosophical anthropology moves. On this issue see Hartung, *Das Maß des Menschen*.

47 Trabandt, *Europäisches Sprachdenken*, p. 263.

48 Humboldt, *Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluß auf die geistige Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts* (1907), p. 53 and p. 46.

49 Steinthal, “Allgemeine Einleitung in Humboldts sprachphilosophische Arbeiten”, p. 14.

reality of appearances and historical development. This last point especially makes it clear that Steinthal, in addition the opposition of spirit-matter dualism and matter-(spirit)monism (and thus apart from the conflict as to whether one should take the side of Kant or Darwin), considers the third possibility of a critically reflective monism.

That is the background to Lazarus Geiger’s theory of the origin and evolution of language. Geiger also places himself in the tradition of linguistic research of his time, which he interprets as “a great, unbelievably important event for the history of humanity”.⁵⁰ This great event is characterized by the fact that there, for the first time, the possibility is opened, in a theoretical-historical regard but with cultural-historical consequences, of considering the human both as individual and as part of a “total-existence” (humanity) [*eines “Gesamtdaseins” (Menschheit)*]. The history of language is to achieve what the consideration of the history of peoples, their religions, forms of government, morals and customs were not capable of. “Language [...] bears in itself the characteristics of its humanity; what results from its history is [...] the history of the most human, what the human possesses, even of the authentically human generally.”⁵¹

The analysis of the human is undertaken first of all in the form of a critique of Kantian philosophy using the benchmark of the latter’s exclusion of humanity’s linguistic nature and historicity. Geiger formulates the programme for a critique of Kant which is to have “an examination of reason through the experience of it, through its history” as its content.⁵² In connection with this he outlines a developmental history of reason which – in agreement with Darwin and in opposition to Müller – reckons only with a “gradual transition between the animal and the human”.⁵³ In his consistently monist perspective, language cannot be

⁵⁰ Geiger, *Ursprung der Sprache*, p. 16.

⁵¹ Geiger, *Ursprung und Entwicklung der menschlichen Sprache und Vernunft*, Vol. 1, “Vorrede”, p. VII.

⁵² Geiger, *Ursprung der Sprache*, p. 197: “We will, in the face of the idea concerning reason that we won from language, renew the business of a critical investigation of reason. [...] An examination of reason through the experience of it, through its history, this is what our thinking demands; it is the philosophical task of the present. [...] the critique of reason is impossible, logic merely formal, metaphysics untenable, if it does not rest on this historical basis, on the knowledge measured by experience [*erfahrungsmäßigen Kenntniß*] of the becoming of reason in a pre-human Ur-time and its evolution up to the height that is presently known to us.”

⁵³ Geiger, *Ursprung der Sprache*, p. 187; and he adds on p. 199: “that the human stepped up from a lower animalistic level is proved to me with irrefutable certainty from historical considerations”.

anything other than a “product of nature”, namely “originally an animalistic cry, however, such a one that happens at an impression of the visual sense.”⁵⁴

With the concept of the visual sense Geiger shifts a specific characteristic of the human organism into the foreground. Visual sense, coupled with walking upright, already structures perception. Consequent to this, it must be the particular form of perception – Geiger speaks here of a unity of two productive vital powers, movement and receptivity – that, on his view, provides the impulse to generate the human capacity for language. Every other explanation presupposes something outside the evolution of life. However, Geiger’s hypothesis has a price: he takes the question concerning the origin of language to a point where it gets lost in the shallows of physiological observation. Whoever assumes that “all thinking, through the mediation of language, emerged from perception through visual sense”⁵⁵ merely extrapolates from the stimulation of the nerves to phonetic material and the emergent roots of language.⁵⁶

Max Müller recoils at precisely this point. On his view, we are far away from “identifying” the roots of language with the vibration of the nerves. Seen in perspective, it would perhaps be possible in the future to establish “that the vibrations of the sense organs provide at least raw material for these roots.”⁵⁷ According to Müller’s objection, however, until then the problem of language in the sense of an initial moving element of mental development remains unresolved. Geiger, however, does not shrink before these consequences but instead gives two additional considerations. For one thing, the derivation of language and reason “from almost nothing”⁵⁸ is completely unproblematic for him especially be-

54 Geiger, “Die Sprache und ihre Bedeutung für die Entwicklungsgeschichte der Menschheit”, p. 22.

55 Geiger, *Ursprung der Sprache*, p. 185.

56 See Noiré, *Die Welt als Entwicklung des Geistes*, which further develops this hypothesis. Gehlen’s *Der Mensch*, pp. 193–194, emphasizes that here, for the first time in linguistic philosophy, the ‘motoric element’ is not overlooked and adds “here I also mean nothing more than this [?]”. See Hartung, *Das Maß des Menschen*, pp. 175–185 on this.

57 Müller, *Vorlesungen über die Wissenschaft der Sprache*, p. 196: “It remains an open question as to how a simple cry (interjections or imitation of sounds [*Lautnachahmungen*]) can evolve into phonetic types [*lautliche Typen*] and how mere vibrations of the nerves can be rational concepts.” See Cassirer’s *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, Vol. 1, pp. 113–123 on this.

58 Geiger, *Ursprung und Entwicklung der menschlichen Sprache und Vernunft*, Vol. 1, p. 219. See Julius Keller’s *Lazarus Geiger und die Kritik der Vernunft*, p. 11. Geiger assumes the determination of linguistics as an experiential science, as well as the idea that the evolutionary history of the human spirit is empirically ascertainable. “What is new is the attempt to want to pursue the evolution of the human spirit over historical and pre-historic time up to its springing forth ‘from nothing’ and all of this in a purely empirical way.”

cause within the theory of evolution there is no serious alternative. In addition, his argument aims at a further point:

The universality, which corresponds to the laws of conceptual evolution particularly when it comes to the most ancient components raises language out of the domain not only of the merely individual, psychological but also out of that of a national phenomenon. No longer peoples, nor humanity in its actions and entire existence on earth, in the origin and evolution of its special nature as a species, gifted with reason, set apart from the animal world, establishes a paleoanthropological, in a certain sense, cosmic reproach of universal reflections on language.⁵⁹

2.5 Linguistic Development and Linguistic Diversity

Geiger formulates the wide-reaching hypothesis that treating the question of the origin of language as well as the development of language demands that the observer make “humanity in its occurrence and entire existence on earth” into its research theme. It is here especially that research into language is distinct from the investigations of law, religion, morals, customs and so on. That is one of the basic ideas that is inscribed in a privileging of language in the debates of the 19th century, particularly in a Jewish context. It can be found also in the title of the *Journal for the Psychology of Peoples and Science of Language* [*Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*] (from 1860) which deals with language in the singular and peoples in the plural. The object of linguistics is humanity but the psychology of peoples or social psychology deals with particular-historical trends. Both aspects of the entire existence of the human stand in dialectical tension. To put it in Hegelian terms: the mediation of the historical-particular and the universal trans-historical aspects of human existence, of particular articulations of cultural life and the internal form as the capacity for linguistic articulation takes place in the theory of objective spirit.⁶⁰

The consideration of the universal capacity for language in respect to the diversity of language is, in Steinthal and Geiger, enclosed in this schema of dialectical mediation. Linguistic development is both differentiation as well as enrichment. “For every development is the continual acceptance of the strange, under

⁵⁹ Geiger, *Ursprung der Sprache*, “Vorrede”, pp. XXVII–XXVIII.

⁶⁰ See Köhnke, “Einleitung”, in: Lazarus, *Grundzüge der Völkerpsychologie und Kulturwissenschaft*, pp. IX–XLII, who, however, emphasizes the difference in the signifying sense between objective spirit in Lazarus/Steinthal and in Hegel. On the possibility of mediation between divergent readings of Hegel, see Hartung, “Noch eine Erbschaft Hegels. Der geistesgeschichtliche Kontext der Kulturphilosophie”.

the reciprocal reconciliation of peculiarities in which each part is changed and changes.”⁶¹ We are dealing here, as is well-known, with two possibilities for thinking about evolution – either in regard to the prospect of a future unity and thus in the mode of the acceptance of the strange or in looking back towards the loss of an original unity and thus in the mode of excluding the strange. The Babylonian trauma certainly stands in the background of this exclusion motif in linguistic theory whose outcome – linguistic diversity as the loss of linguistic unity – is considered as one of the weightiest curses on humanity. This motif returns as the eternal struggle between the preservation of the species and degeneration in 19th century theories of language that embrace Darwinism such as that of August Schleicher and in 20th century bio-politics. Geiger was far-sighted enough to oppose this position: “Language is evolution, not degeneration.”⁶²

Geiger was one of the important theorists of language and culture in his time on the basis of his implicitly estimated calculation that Darwinian biological monism (and its later successors) is not to be met by recourse to a mind-body dualism. Dualism is too weak in the face of the evidence within the investigation of nature. The adversary is only to be met in the field of a monist worldview itself. Hence Geiger conceived a theory of the unity of nature and spirit that first understands the relationship between nature and spirit not as an automatism and, second, linguistic diversity is understood not as a deficient mode of an original unity and, thirdly, evolution is not understood not as a struggle to demarcate or exclude the other but as striving to accept the other in its “peculiarity”.

“That nothing human will be strange to us” – as Geiger says in a prominent passage – “[...] is well explained as what is at issue everywhere in language is a wonderful product in which nature and spirit are unified and nature has become spirit.”⁶³ Thus, the consideration of language in the Humboldtian tradition, in which Steinthal and Geiger stand, is fundamentally distinguished from an investigation of language that operates with a naturalistic conception of evolution. The theoretical-historical option of considering evolution in the medium of language has been quite aptly characterized with the slogan “Kantianized Spinozism” (Steinthal) or “refined Spinozism” [*geläuterter Spinozismus*].⁶⁴ The theory of the unity of nature and spirit in the sense of “Kantianized Spinozism” does

61 Geiger, *Ursprung und Entwicklung der menschlichen Sprache und Vernunft*, Vol. 1 (cited by Reichenau, p. 177).

62 Geiger, *Ursprung der Sprache*, “Vorrede”, p. XXVIII.

63 Geiger, *Ursprung und Entwicklung der menschlichen Sprache und Vernunft*, Vol. 1, p. XI.

64 See also the rather vague formulation in Reichenau’s *Die monistische Philosophie von Spinoza bis auf unsere Tage*, p. 172: “Geiger’s monism is a refined Spinozism [*ein geläuterter Spinozismus*].”

not mean crude naturalism but a critically reflective monism that sets the core of the problem of language – unity in diversity under the condition of historical evolution – not in some origin but in an open future.

3 The ‘Spirit of Language’ – Moritz Lazarus

Language must be accompanied by life [...]
Here, in active speaking and understanding,
Every single person creates [...] their language anew.
(Moritz Lazarus)¹

Moritz Lazarus is one of the most important theorists of language and culture of the late 19th century.² He investigated different aspects of cultural life in his collection of monographs *The Life of the Soul* [*Das Leben der Seele*] (first edition: 1856–1860). As the co-founder of the *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*, he, together with his colleague Heymann Steinthal, created an important organ for the cultural studies that emerged at this time. Among his students, Georg Simmel should be mentioned in particular. Clear traces of Lazarus’ writings can be found both in Simmel’s work and in that of others, as we will see in what follows. Compared to Steinthal, Lazarus can be regarded as the more original thinker and he, like Steinthal, produced works in the fields of linguistic theory and philosophy of religion as well as in the fields of psychology and the analysis of socio-cultural life. His essays on language also serve to make this independence clear.³

3.1 On Language

Lazarus had dedicated one of his monographs on *Das Leben der Seele* to the topic of language.⁴ He as well constantly emphasizes the “connection of spirit with language at all times and on all sides”, which makes this latter “form, fetter and shape of the spirit”.⁵ Lazarus, who was schooled in Herbartian psychology, brings a new element to the problem of the origin of language:

1 Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 403.

2 On the biographical and theoretical-historical background see the Köhnke’s introduction to Moritz Lazarus’ *Grundzüge der Völkerpsychologie und Kulturwissenschaft*, pp. IX–XLII.

3 See Lazarus’ *Ethik des Judentums* (1898) and its place in the debate about a “renewal of Jewish philosophy of religion at the end of the 19th century” in the section of the same name in Julius Guttmann’s *Die Philosophie des Judentums*.

4 Moritz Lazarus, *Das Leben der Seele in Monographien über seine Erscheinungen und Gesetze*. Vol. 2: *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie* (3rd edition, 1885).

5 Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 5.

The beginnings of language were brought about in a developmental process which, viewed as a historical event, were perhaps carried out over the course of centuries, probably over millennia. Psychology now seeks to describe the individual moments which this process would have necessarily have passed through but it is completely unable to record the actual real processes within the individual and the particular content that varies each time with which and by which the soul of the people is preoccupied.⁶

With this remark Lazarus takes his leave of the field of historical linguistic research in which Humboldt and Steinthal, as well as Becker or Schleicher can also be found. He brackets the search for knowledge of the factual history of language. What interests him, however, is the knowledge of the psychical (and psychophysical) processes and laws which came into use in this development and which are still to come. It is in this sense that what is at issue for him is the “generation [*Erzeugung*]” and “further formation [*Fortbildung*]” of language.⁷ For Lazarus, language is the result of an interaction between cognitive and bodily activity. Language is the “embodiment [*Verkörperung*]” of spirit.⁸ At this point Lazarus notes that we have hitherto been far from having the ability to appropriately describe this relation. This is because we constantly run into the snares of a dualism that does not recognize this interaction or a monist one-sidedness that reduces spirit to matter or inversely.

Through an analysis of actual and thus living language we can nevertheless recognize that the hearing as well as the producing of sound is at issue. The origin of language lies in this process, in social interaction. It must have arisen in all linguistic participants [*Sprachgenossen*] simultaneously and with the same necessity. It cannot simply be generated through a kind of agreement but it appears with an inner necessity, a necessity whose deciphering is the object of psychological investigation. “Thus in a word: thought itself is internally changed in itself through sound and with this spirit (as the sum and generative cause of thought) [is changed too] through language.”⁹

An inner transformation takes place in the hearing of language (as the speaking of another). The perception of sounds is part of an overall process which Lazarus calls “apperception”, taking over a term from Herbartian psychology, which refers back, via Kant, down to its roots in Leibniz. He is referring to “the reaction that of the content already fulfilled, that is more or less formed

6 Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 8.

7 Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 12.

8 Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 21.

9 Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 25.

through earlier processes of the soul”.¹⁰ The soul takes up sensible data (perception) through external receptivity and aligns this with sets of data acquired earlier (apperception). This is the reason why our current overall impression is always interspersed with traces of memory. The occurrence, as a rule, runs its course unconsciously and leads to various lapses and shifts in the current view and assessment of a situation.¹¹

The logical determinations of the activity of the understanding established by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (in the transcendental deduction of the pure concepts of the understanding) was already given a resolutely psychological interpretation by his successor Herbart. Lazarus translates them into an overall process of the hearing of language (as activity of the soul). The individual elements of the process are – and this remains as in Kant – synthetic activities that are then specified by Lazarus as the “co-movement” of sounds, as “associative movement” in perception and as movement of “reproduction” in the soul. Analogously to the Kantian generation of the categories in the understanding, Lazarus refers to a generation of sounds in speaking that is grounded in an inner necessity, free from all wilfulness in hearing.¹²

With reference to Steinthal (*Ursprung der Sprache*, p. 119f.), Lazarus notes that “no spirit [is] without language [while the inverse also holds, namely that] language itself, however, belongs in the sphere of the mind”. In short: “Language is the birthplace of spirit.”¹³ Lazarus takes recourse to the concept of the “soul”, which he conceives as an inner movement or activity, so as to further analyse this relation. While the movement of the body stands under mechanistic laws, a moment of freedom on the part of the activity of the soul is to be noted, even if it is also assessed as little. All of the kinds of movement of the

10 Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 42. Compare the article “Apperzeption” in the *Handwörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. Rudolf Eisler, pp. 46–48.

11 Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 55: “The fact that an apperception takes place in connection with a sensible perception and that we owe the momentary content of our knowledge to the former and not the latter [*jener und nicht dieser verdanken*], withdraws itself for the most part from simple consciousness. From this necessarily originates many errors in the view of the given.”

12 Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 73: “The process of the peculiarly human generation of sounds, the articulation of the tones, the bringing forth of vowels [*Vocalen*] and consonants [*Consonanten*] accordingly are grounded in the original nature of human and psychically moving organism [*menschlichen psychisch bewegten Organismus*] and are carried out before all volition, thus without the purposeful influence of the spirit [*absichtliche Einwirkung des Geistes*], however, on the occasion of sensations and representations [*Empfindungen und Vorstellungen*].”

13 Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, pp. 74–75.

body can be depicted in a “ladder” whose first rung is the domain of the mechanical, followed by the domain of the mechanical-organic and which from there proceeds up to the organic and the organic-psychic, finally leading to the domain of the psychical. A thoroughgoing lawfulness holds sway in all the species of movement, but an increase in freedom does too.¹⁴

When Lazarus deals with the soul, he means an individuation of soul and body. Transposed to the topic of language, the bringing together of thinking and speaking rests on an inner movement of the soul. Steinthal’s inner linguistic form reverts to its psychological version here and even points towards Wilhelm Dilthey’s psychology.¹⁵ In Lazarus that means it is possible for the human to bring forth sounds because “we think them!”¹⁶

Lazarus (and after him Dilthey) finds the secret of the relation between thinking and speaking in the peculiar construction of the soul’s activity. This also provides the background to his theory of the origin of language. Language arises in the human soul, on Lazarus’s view, because an inner movement that correlates with the outer movements of the body and is mediated by sensation, intuition and feeling. “We emphatically note, however, in opposition to other psychological theories, that a new state of the soul is actually also created with any bodily feeling, that thus the soul actually feels with the body [...]; that specific bodily states generate analogous states of the soul.”¹⁷

It is true that Lazarus also recognizes psychical processes that can be carried out without language (which is why we humans have something in common with animals) and he is also not averse to the hypothesis of a pre-linguistic state of the soul. However, he sees these only as exceptions to the general rule that every intuition of a thing is accompanied by the generation of a sound that corresponds to the particular sensations. That is the core of his anthropological the-

14 Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, pp. 79–80: a long footnote on the discussion with Rudolf Virchow, Emil Dubois-Reymond and Hermann Lotze. On this, see the article on the soul in the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. J. Ritter, Vol. 9, 34.883–34.975. Pauen, *Was ist der Mensch?*, Part 1. Darin, *Der Streit um Seele, Lebenskraft und Darwinismus*, pp. 70–87. Hagner, *Homo cerebrialis – Der Wandel vom Seelenorgan zum Gehirn*.
15 See Dilthey, *Ideen über eine beschreibende und zergliedernde Psychologie*.

16 Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 84; and he adds on pp. 85–86: “It follow from this observation that the articulated sounds which the speaking human being brings forth can only be brought forth through the combination of these with the representations of these sounds; thus neither for the available and experienced nor for the origination and creation of successful speech are the tones an immediate product of volition and of knowledge; they must rather already be available and given, be present as an involuntary product so as to be able to be in any combination with representations.”

17 Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 90.

sis that “the real language, however, [is ...] the specifically human”.¹⁸ Sensation and intuition interact in the generation of a sound, it is thus not merely raw material from which language originates. This interaction occurs in accordance with the law of “association” and without the fitting together of impression and expression being totally arbitrary. Lazarus stresses the regularity of a procedure in which the inner intuition of sound, by virtue of “association with movement”, becomes the efficient cause of the generation of the sound.

In one remarkable section Lazarus summarizes his conception of the initial creation of language and then transitions to the portrayal of psychical processes in which he intends to subsequently secure considerations that are at first only formulated hypothetically:

In all these species of sound generation, we recognized the driving power that is established in the nature of the human organism strives to compensate for the force of the impression through expression; the soul as well as the organism itself needs, as it were, a release from the mass of impressions received and we will later see more clearly how an enduring elevation of the soul over this sensed material takes forms from this momentary release. [...] It might even be said, by analogy with the body, that there is a striving for release in the soul itself too which is aroused through its own free activity by the force of the impressions received. This creative striving in the human soul cannot be assumed too early.¹⁹

This last comment is to indeed be taken seriously. Lazarus surmises that cultural development is dependent on an exercise of the capacity for language in which the soul liberates itself from the unreasonable demands of the external world. While at the beginning of human cultural history much must remain in the domain of the unspeakable and the unsayable such that the objectification of the onrush of sensible impressions was not possible, in later times the relation was inverted. What was the rule at the beginning is the exception of a higher level of cultural development – and *vice versa*. We can therefore glean an understanding of the standard of culture spanning its history in the history of language, but although this is expressed differently in different spheres of culture, it does not reveal any insurmountable barriers between peoples, nations and races (Schleicher). For Lazarus that means, in a general-anthropological sense, that: “Language [is] the distinguishing feature of human nature, the specific work of the human soul.”²⁰ Without language there would not be human beings and there is no real language outside of the human.

18 Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 87.

19 Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 127.

20 Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 129.

Besides language there is a second area in which the standard of cultural development expresses itself, namely, religion. On Lazarus's view, like language, the presentiment of the divine, the doubling in a visible and an invisible world, is also particularly characteristic of human beings. It is in this context that a sentence can be found whose influence can scarcely be overstated. It can be found anew in different formulations in Hermann Cohen's studies on the philosophy of religion and in Ernst Cassirer's work on the theory of symbols:

It is not because humans are humans that they recognize God, but they are humans because they recognize God, that means the recognition of God belongs with the concept of the human and is [not] merely its accidental characteristic; and on whatever level their recognition of this [the divine] is located, there too is their humanity.²¹

Returning to the theory of language in a narrower sense, we see that Lazarus appropriates the idea [*Denkfigur*] of the "inner form of language" and explains it as the involuntary [*unwillkürliches*] work of the soul. The inner form of language enables a transformation of external sensible impressions, a liberation from their force and a taking of distance as well as the generation of an adequate expression. Thus language affects the spirit by means of the inner form of language. Consequently, the vitality of the principle of the inner form of language is crucial to the richness of a language. A language develops itself to the extent that the inner form of language fulfils its task. The vital principle of linguistic creation gradually loses in power when the unspeakable and unsayable is extensively translated into linguistic expression. Lazarus observes of his present that the process of linguistic creation has already been long completed and the entry of language into time of historical existence has been accomplished.²²

At this point Lazarus confronts a prejudice that still dominates the discussion of language and its origin and development today. This is the view that language can be reduced to a communicative function.²³ Lazarus vehemently opposes this fallacy.²⁴ Although he also recognizes the influence of social life on the progress of language and analyses in a somewhat amusing way a dialectic of

²¹ Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, pp. 129–130.

²² Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, pp. 154 ff.

²³ On this, compare the recent, differentiated but still one-sided judgment of the anthropologist Michael Tomasello, *Die Ursprünge der menschlichen Kommunikation*.

²⁴ Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 155: "Indeed, it in fact depends on the actual development, so clearly and forcefully as possible to prove that the essence of language is not exhausted in its communicative purpose [*in ihrer Bestimmung zur Mittheilung*] nor is the creation of language brought forth from the intention of communicating."

speech and silence in society as the condition for the raising of the human soul to the level of activity which he calls spirit. However, he sees the materialistic theories of his time as characterized by a failure to take account of capacities for creation that Kant had subsumed under the concept of the “spontaneity of the activity of the understanding” and which Lazarus will later speak of as the “necessary and free activity of the soul”.²⁵

These theoretical considerations have a quite practical relevance, as Lazarus's comments on the learning of and further education in language illustrate. Children already have language at their disposal, we simply teach them “our language”. Our children generate both the sounds of language as well as the inner form of language itself. Language learning is not a matter of mere reactions or repetitions. Lazarus rejects the theory of language acquisition by imitation.²⁶ The result of his psychological reflections and his descriptions, which are based on empirical observations, is “that on the one hand, an infinitely great number of the child's ideas are only introduced through language, on the other hand, that every idea, which the words the child hears occasion, must still come into being in the child itself”.²⁷ Lazarus is inclined to view the human individual, despite natural and socio-cultural lines of descent, as ultimately the one who brings forth language and in this way maintains that the possibility of linguistic creation is a source of cultural development that never runs dry.

3.2 On Cultural Development or the Influence of Language on Spirit

The model of cultural development proves itself with every new beginning that happens with a human birth.²⁸ The phylogenetic original history of the civilized

²⁵ Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 164. Lazarus condenses these considerations into an anthropological hypothesis: “Only the free in the spirit is human” (p. 165).

²⁶ As background to this see Cassirer's *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, Vol. 1, pp. 124–148.

²⁷ In Lazarus' *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, there is a detailed discussion of Herbartian psychology in the footnotes, pp. 180–181.

²⁸ Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 214: “Every new born human must, like the original humans, begin to think, through language it comes, under favourable conditions in the tiny series of the years of a human life to be set at the height of a development that is millennia old.”

human being repeats itself in ontogenesis. “Inheritance” has thereby a double meaning, for what is meant is both biological inheritance as well as cultural heritage given by language. It is in the latter that the most essential takes place. Although the cultural side of inheritance is connected with basic biological conditions – Lazarus too accepts, from the physiology of this time, the thesis that the development of the brain is an important cultural factor²⁹ – he sees cultural heritage as having a clear primacy. All inheritance and all progressive development of the organs first gain their success in the progressive history of humanity, as well as of the individual human being, essentially through the inheritance of cultural goods and the ever renewing exercise of cultural acts.³⁰

Language is an indispensable medium for the cultural aspect of inheritance. It is not merely a “means of communication” but rather, as Lazarus emphasizes, “means of formation or of education [*Bildungsmittel*]”. It is through an analysis of linguistic development that we recognize the cultural level of an epoch of human history. Lazarus seeks to avoid the errors of a materialistic as well as of an idealistic position. On his view, the meaning of “culture” can neither be directly read from the material relationships nor be immediately understood as the emanation of spirit. Rather we must recognize the “structure of spirit [*Gebilde des Geistes*]” in material (i. e. natural and social) conditions of human life and the activity of the mind in every event.³¹ Ernst Cassirer will introduce his programme of a *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* [*Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*] in almost the same terms by saying that neither the act of producing (symbolic activity) nor the producer (the human) nor even the bond of producing (culture) are something outside of cognitive activity: “*Being is comprehensible nowhere other than in doing [das Sein ist hier nirgends anders als im Tun erfassbar]*.”³²

For Lazarus the term “spirit” designates a complex of conscious and unconscious activity. He documents the dependence of his theory on Herbart’s analysis of psychical processes in a detailed footnote. At the centre of this stands the concept of the “condensation of thinking [*Verdichtung des Denkens*]” which Lazarus worked to further develop. Condensation means a psychological and, so to

²⁹ See as background to this debate Hagner, *Homo cerebrialis – Der Wandel vom Seelenorgan zum Gehirn*.

³⁰ Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 217.

³¹ Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 221: “The way our spirit procures, the extent to which it is gradually changed, we only recognize in a wholly determinate way because we recognize the activity of this is recognized together with its contents and thus the structure of the mind, of the soul and its generation.”

³² Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, Vol. 1, p. 11. See Hartung, *Das Maß des Menschen*, pp. 219–254.

speak, a cultural-historical explanation for the Kantian problem of how synthetic *a priori* judgments are possible. The psychical process of condensation designates an original synthesis, i.e. a judgment is formed from out of gradually accumulated and ascending condensations of sensible data. At every moment of experience, the psychical mechanism enables us to compress the masses of sensible data provided to us by our five senses. Lazarus now maintains that this condensed sense data, and not the large and broad masses of experience, present the material for the human capacity for judgment which then “presently generates” a judgment as actual and born from spontaneity in the Kantian sense.³³

According to Lazarus, only the analysis of psychical process of condensation gives us a reliable clue for understanding the enigma of individuality. For it is only in the taking up of sensible data and in specific experience, i.e., in the selective taking up and taking over of sensible impressions and in their condensation to specific contents of experience as well as in the mental activity, that allows one to judge these contents of experience as his or her own experience and for him or her to take a position. Individuality only constitutes itself in this entire process. We see this process occurring in all the events of the soul and body. It is thus necessary to

remark that there can be scarcely a more essential and more characteristic element for the constituting of individuality, be it the individuality of intellectual personalities [*geistiger Persönlichkeiten*], be it intellectual works [*Werke*] as the measure of fullness, energy and constant clarity of psychical elements, that are thought or stimulated in a given moment of time in a uniform thought or thought rich in associations.³⁴

The concept of condensation in thinking allows us to conceive of the emergence of individuality. We get an impression of how a manifold of impressions are brought over to a unity, how the unclear is made clear, how the fleeting moment stands still and how the undetermined thought is determined. In the analysis of the processes of condensation we work out how much time, what expenditure of power and what “objective energy or intensity of content” is necessary to make

33 Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 233.

34 Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 239. And he adds (p. 238–240): “Every process of the mind too has, as experience teaches, a certain duration and demands a certain expenditure of force and energy. We repeat the habitual, the contents of through we are familiar with, quickly and playfully; we grasp the new slowly and with effort; that which is simple to think happens quickly, the composite and the correlated slowly and with difficulty. The condensing of thinking thus consists in our grasping the same content in a short time and with less exertion of force.”

possible the individuality of experience. In addition, the individual-psychological and cultural-theoretical perspective discloses the consequence of this, namely, that the consumption of time and power for the condensation of thinking is constantly diminished while the domain and the energy of content is constantly increased with progressive cultural development. To put it another way, in the course of our lives we develop a mental competence as regards orienting ourselves in thinking and acting in less time and without a greater expenditure of power despite variable contextual conditions. In this way the spiritual content, be it aesthetic or moral notions, obtains its own effective intensity. What holds here for the individual also holds regarding collective unities.

It is understandable, especially with regard to collective structures such as societies and peoples, that Lazarus underscores the participation of unconscious elements in psychical process. Unconscious energy resonates in every judgment. What is important here, and this holds for both individual and collective structures, is that, in addition to the conscious elements in the psychical process, there is also a sum of unconscious energies which increases astonishingly with the evolution of culture and which is “made to resonate, hence made excitable and mobile, and is at any rate is made capable of entering into the act of thinking and if necessary also into the act of consciousness”.³⁵

The process of condensation can be depicted using the example of the development of language. Language originates from the psychical-organic human nature at the specific stage of the life of the soul. This level is characterized on the one hand by the soul’s forming intuitions from out of the received impressions, the latter being sensations that have become internal. On the other hand, the word, i.e. the expressed sound, forms on the basis of an organic interaction between soul and body. The meaning of the word originates through the gathering together of these moments such that the soul perceives the connection between its own intuition and the appropriate sound in itself. This inner perceiving is a new activity of the thinking being and is defined by Herbart and Lazarus “[as] a new conception, not of something exterior but of one’s own interiority”, as an intuition of intuitions, in short, as an idea.³⁶

In an article for the *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft* and in the debate that followed this article, Lazarus had already stressed that the Kantian and Herbartian theory of apperception must be expanded.³⁷ There is, in his view, not only a function of apperception but different kinds of apperception.

³⁵ Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 243.

³⁶ Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 250.

³⁷ See Lazarus, *Einige synthetische Gedanken zur Völkerpsychologie*.

Any recognition of a thing or a person is the simplest form of apperception. All knowledge is based on the perception of similarities and on the subsumption of individual events under general structures (formation of types, rules and so on). However, in the explanation of the relation of the receptivity of perception and the spontaneity of judging, Lazarus is not only concerned with the theoretical side of the problem, but also with the practical side. In addition to the discovery of general conceptions in the apperception process, in which discovery leads to the explanation of the constitution of individuality, culture and science, there is also the side of cultural praxis. This latter consists in the application of general concepts and rules, that is, it consists in the apperception of individual things and events through the established general concepts. For Lazarus the psychologist, the dialectical relation of individual event and rule-guided habit (in interpreting and acting) is of central significance to his endeavour to take a deep look at the socio-cultural conditions of human life.

Lazarus shows, using the example of medical and legal practice, that the problem of an appropriate apperception is posed day in and day out and requires solutions suitable for everyday use. However, not only doctors and lawyers but all of us, in dealing with our everyday lives, are faced with the problem that the same things can be given in different apperceptions. "A simple example can illustrate this; we know that all measurement is an apperception of the object through the measure; but the determinate scale is the ground for apperception each time." A general rule follows from this: "Depending on the co-active ideas which accompany the apperceiving idea and the one which is to be apperceived, the apperception turns out differently."³⁸

The differentiation of a form and the different kinds of apperception implies that the possibilities of experience and of the constituting of individuality extend to infinity. On Lazarus's view, an infinite fullness of possibilities of experiencing the world, the self as self and encountering people is undeniable. In a psychological study, however, no more than a fleeting indication can be given of the multiplicity of relations in which humanity, each people, each individual, apperceives the phenomena of the world. Only a mature social psychology can give a reliable impression of this horizon of possibilities of human life. In spite of this praise of diversity, Lazarus remains indebted to an intuition of Hegel's: he assumes that the diversity of things constitute a world-whole and the "world" itself

³⁸ Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, pp. 256–257. Lazarus describes the way from a mistaken to a fitting apperception with reference to Lessing's *Nathan der Weise*.

is a system of parts incrementally related to a whole.³⁹ It is against the background of the structural interrelation of the world of the mind that, a few decades later, Wilhelm Dilthey will undertake his outline of the *Construction of the Historical World in the Humanities* [*Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften*].⁴⁰

For Lazarus the correlation between the individual and humanity is of decisive significance. He wants to show, on both levels, how a world emerges, how each individual from the chaotic mass of impressions comes through apperception to a total picture of “his world” and how humanity as a whole manages the “step from chaos to cosmos”.⁴¹ It is in this activity – and not in any specific condition or status – that the dignity of the human life-form shows itself. Only by taking the individual as an example can it be shown what is humanly possible. For, as Lazarus emphasizes, the conception of things and events is dependent on our education or formation of our own I, our respective personality. There is no objective and neutral worldview but only individual experience which can nevertheless be inscribed, by way of linguistic communication, into an infinite process of approaching and of understanding. Yet everything begins with the individual. Shaping an image of the world, first of all its world, this is the determination of the individual spirit, this is the highest priority of individuality of the mind.⁴² This principle also does not stand in contradiction to the two directions of the apperception process – i.e., from the single perception to the total picture and from this retroactively back to the perception. In historical time and at a specific level of cultural development the influence of the “categories of ideality” achieves a great intensity and impact on the process of apperception. In a cultural-theoretical regard Lazarus thinks that the sphere of immediate experience is increasingly restricted and that concepts previously condensed in the cultural process themselves create realities. This concerns both scientific methods as well as artisanal practices, rules of social life and economic trade as well as principles of design in architecture, in the arts and much more.⁴³

39 Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 260. On this see Hartung, “Noch eine Erbschaft Hegels. Der geistesgeschichtliche Kontext der Kulturphilosophie”.

40 See Dilthey, *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften*.

41 Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 261.

42 Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 262.

43 Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 267: “It is finally to be remarked of all species of apperception that they do not only come to existence by means of single, simple or compound ideas as organs of apperception but equally by condensed thoughts; methods of thinking and work, maxims of action, rules of art are psychic organs by virtue of which every individual, to which they refer, is apperceived.”

In spite of the dominance of ideas, rules and structures, there remains a residuum of creative possibilities that make up the core of individuality. There is, according to Lazarus, an incalculably great number of examples for individual activity. He mentions in this context the determinist Spinoza, whose own project paradoxically contradicts his theory, precisely because a new thinking begins with him; he lets our spirit make a leap and thereby indicates an “inscrutable magic” in its process of origination, despite his theory only knowing of a causal sequence of mechanistic determinism.⁴⁴ Although the ideas that we have at our disposal are general and the words we use form a general cultural reservoir, our intuitions are still always singular and our speaking still implies a bringing forth of sentences (and not mere words).

A special case of condensation in thinking is the transforming of ideas to concepts. Lazarus sees here a clear state of cultural progress. He illustrates the difference between idea and concept in the history of human thinking, using the example of space. We have wholly individual perceptions of space but at the same time general ideas and historically variable concepts. Although a permanent process of generalization takes place in upbringing and instruction, the differences in individual perception and experience (“indeterminate and incomplete conglomerates of intuitions”) cannot be raised to the general contents of an idea. Yet nonetheless a regularity in the idea and in the application of the word “space” originates in a people. It is this identity of ideas that is generated through a unity of the spirit of a people or the “constituting power of language which binds individuals with one another in the soul of the people”.⁴⁵

The level of concepts, on which all science and all systematic and coherent knowledge is based, is to be distinguished from this. Concepts follow from ideas and, as ideas are necessarily bound with and conditioned by words, “it thus follows that all science as such is necessarily conditioned by language. There is indeed intuitive knowledge of individual things or rather appearances outside of and before language; but there is only comprehension and knowledge by means of language.”⁴⁶ It can also be said as regards this that the sediments of linguistic development are to be found in concepts. As opposed to ideas, which are each linked with a word and that fulfil their presence, concepts are forms of words in which the memory of past ideas is linked with the presence of present representations. What is at issue in conceptual formation is not tran-

⁴⁴ Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 268.

⁴⁵ Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 305. Lazarus speaks also of the soul of the people as the “point of origin of the entire spirit” (p. 307).

⁴⁶ Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 306.

scendental apperception in the Kantian sense but cultural-historical apperception. The memory of human history is reflected in the basic concepts and categorical determinations of society and science. We see with all clarity here how Lazarus emphasizes “the thinking formed by language”.⁴⁷

Among those Lazarus recognizes in the different forms of objective spirit, the linguistic form of thought is the most universal way in which life is objectified. What is always at issue is an interaction between the individual and the totality in the “generation” of objective spirit. The treatise *Synthetic Thoughts on Social Psychology* [*Synthetische Gedanken zur Völkerpsychologie*] contains the fundamental ideas of a theory of objective spirit. It is only faintly reminiscent of his predecessor Hegel but it makes clear Dilthey’s dependence on his teacher Lazarus.⁴⁸ Forms of objective spirit are justice, from the sense of justice to just law-giving, religion, from religious experience to religious system, art, from artistic expression to the style of an epoch and other areas of culture.⁴⁹ All these areas, in spite of all their differences, testify to the formative influence of language. Without language, the “process of the true ennoblement of the human” is inconceivable as the formation of humanity is essentially connected with its effectiveness.⁵⁰ The construction of the inner world of spirit, whose external aspect is the construction of the historical world, is due to the influence of language. Inner and outer are interconnected and in constant interaction in language. The articulation and perception of linguistic sounds impacts the formation [*Bildung*] of an inner world of the soul as well as an outer social

⁴⁷ Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 307.

⁴⁸ See Dilthey, *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften*, pp. 177–178: “We grasp the sum of all the achievements of understanding, thus opens up in them the objectivity of life as opposed to the subjectivity of experience [so tut sich in ihm gegenüber der Subjektivität des Erlebnisses die Objektivierung des Lebens auf]. Next to experience, the intuition of the objectivity of life, its externalization in manifold structure contents, is the fundamental basis of the human sciences. The individual, the community, the work, in which life and spirit have been laid form the external realm of spirit.”

⁴⁹ Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, pp. 315–335. Here too a citation from Dilthey can serve by way of illustration. See Dilthey, *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften*, p. 178: “The great external reality of spirit always surrounds us. It is a realization of spirit in the world of the sense from fleeting expression up to the centuries long dominance of a constitution or a book of law. Every individual expression of life represents something collective in the realm of objective spirit.”

⁵⁰ Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 336: “We then finally and clearly summarize the overall effect of language on the spirit, we can thus characterize it essentially with two concepts. It consists in: the formation of self-consciousness and the construction of the interior world.”

world. There are regularly recurring, outer as well as inner, “objectively persisting elements of intuition”. Language only fixes the order of these.

Thus the world of the inner life of the soul only generates a fleeting, temporally passing objectively changeable kind of intuitive elements and it is the task of language not merely to establish the formative order of the whole but also the duration and the clarity of the elements. This holds of all inner processes and their natural condition and even more of the ideal quality itself: for we recognized above that all the specifically inner, all the ideal life of the spirit, the ethical religious and aesthetic intuitions, can only be shaped into a firm and clear possession of the soul by means of language.⁵¹

Language is the encounter with oneself and an other. By means of language the human spirit reaches the thoughts of another thinking being and recognizes the thinking spirit in these thoughts. In language it grasps itself in its own thoughts – “that is the noble and magnificent fruit of language”.⁵² In this last comment we see that Lazarus infers from the approaches of his predecessors (from Hegel and Humboldt through Herbart and Steinthal) that the theory of language is to be expanded into a theory of culture. If that which is “most human” comes to expression in language, as Lazarus Geiger had already remarked, then this conclusion is not surprising.

3.3 The Understanding in Language or Conversation

Language has only ever existed in society. The seed of ethical feeling as well lies in the social structures of language [*Sprachlichkeit*]. “It is not merely an ‘I’ but a ‘we’ that appears in every discussion; because by the exchange of words the human being must immediately recognize both itself and also the other as a personality, as a thinking and self-conscious being.”⁵³ However, this thought does not only shed light on the social side of language, it also casts a shadow on it. For we are dealing neither with an identity of spirit and language (as Müller believes) nor even with a fittingness or congruence. That is why the relationship between linguistic articulation and audition also always implies a precarious understanding of the other and the self. Lazarus introduces his reader to the vast region of the mind that withdraws from linguistic expression. He provides examples from out of the experience of ordinary life, from the mimic, to

51 Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 342.

52 Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 343.

53 Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 344.

the posture, to the walk of a person that can be erroneously interpreted. Also individual experiences like the perception of colours cannot be fittingly and indubitably expressed by words, despite our repeated endeavours. Language abandons us in much the same way in the description of the smell of a thing or a person.

The general-anthropological fact that we learn words that are bound to a range of psychologically and logically different forms of thought is a fact of language. This means that for every word there remains uncertainty regarding just what is represented by the word-idea. In early childhood we receive forms of thought which remain wholly unchanged. Spirit passes through all the stages of its development and enriches and deepens the content of those forms through all its activity.⁵⁴ Whether in the region of conceptual formation, on the level of an inner form of language or in the wide field of conventional forms of expression, the difference between spirit and language is clear. Lack of congruence leads to significant insecurity in the use of language. Lazarus thinks that the dangers for social life in the use of language can hardly be overestimated. On the one hand, the world of individual intuitions as such is closed off from language, on the other hand, the world of concepts is threatened in its function in stabilizing culture.

“There is something deceptive in language in general, or rather there is the possibility of deception as regards its content. It conceals the sum and the energy of the content to which words refer.”⁵⁵ In other words, language conceals the conditions of its own generation. Lazarus seems to be the first thinker about language who does not simply put this paradox in mythical images or anecdotes but rigorously analyses it. The solidification of a flowing movement, in Humboldt’s words the usurpation of *Energeia* by the *Ergon*, is inherent in language. Georg Simmel’s definition of the *Tragedy of Modern Culture* [*Tragödie moderner Kultur*] finds its starting point here. This refers to the most extreme consequence of linguistic objectification to the extent that the objective world “is fixed as the other than human, as an unhumanizable, rigid facticity [...]”. That means (in a well-known and concise formulation of the sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann): “The human is paradoxically capable of bringing forth an actuality that disowns it.”⁵⁶ Lazarus diagnoses this possibility in its different gradations up to its most extreme possibility on the level of the individual and the soul as well as the spirit of the people. While the individual and the soul of the people

⁵⁴ Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 356.

⁵⁵ Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 372.

⁵⁶ Berger and Luckmann, *Die gesellschaftliche Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit*, pp. 95–96.

can raise lies and deception to the rule, the spirit of the people condenses it, often engulfing it in “relatively empty thinking and clumsy chatter”.

In the face of the precarious situation in which modern society finds itself, Lazarus calls for “measuring instruments” as means to the fixing of concepts. He expects that the sciences will secure our use of language.⁵⁷ Conversation is thereby attributed a key position. Ideally scientific conversation gives us the means for establishing a balance between understanding and misunderstanding through continuous critical reflection on its general conditions.

A noteworthy example of reflection on the limits of the understanding in language can be found in Walter Benjamin’s collection of letters *German People. A Series of Letters [Deutsche Menschen. Eine Folge von Briefen]* from 1936. This collection of letters is more than an anthology of a declining culture as is often maintained in the secondary literature. Rather, over and above the context in which it originated, it is a fundamental reflection on the possibility of discussion, the limits of understanding and the failure to materialize an answer. Benjamin speaks for good reasons of an “attitude” [*Haltung*] that we take up in the face of our interlocutor. Only an attitude can form a precarious counterweight to mere “chatter” between people and the “suffering” that results from this.⁵⁸ His considerations conclude with a letter by Friedrich Schlegel to his friend Schleiermacher and these words:

Then let us for now rather not talk of it again; for you have given me insight, which otherwise I would have liked from you concerning you, in such an unfriendly way that I would rather not ask for it again. [...] As it has yet happened, I thus take the opportunity to say to you the farewell that has been hovering on my lips for months. It would be good if you thereby felt something, for it can give you occasion at least once to make an exception from your exegesis and at best, *when your intellect permits, to think as a hypothesis that maybe you have quite misunderstood me, from beginning to end. And thus the hope would at least remain that we learn to understand one another one day in future times* [emphasis GH]. And without a shimmer of this hope I would lack the courage to say this farewell. Do not reply to this.⁵⁹

57 Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, pp. 389–393; p. 393 states that “all that science develops, however, is primarily an enrichment of thinking, such that a securing and a fixing of it through language; the methods of observation, discovery, invention and creation of thoughts are complemented by methods of clarification [?] which aim at securing the elucidation in the present [*die Darstellung für die Gegenwart*] as well as the passing it on to the future.”

58 See on this Benjamin’s fundamental reflections on language – as distinct from mere “gossip [*Geschwätz*]” in the Kierkegaardian sense – in his treatise “Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen”.

59 Benjamin, *Deutsche Menschen*, p. 233.

Schlegel formulates the criterion for a successful conversation, namely the taking into account of the possibility of total misunderstanding belongs to it essentially. Only someone who considers this possibility opens their self and the other to the understanding whose success lies in the future. Schleiermacher's exegetical attitude, however, is retrospectively applied and misses the ever-present encounter in conversation that is directed towards future fulfilment.

Most conversations, however, do not meet this standard. The language of the individual here is the expression of an individual spirit just as the language of the people is the expression of a spirit of a people. Both regions are related to one another as part and whole, only not in a logical sense. Language in the spirit of the people is "the whole language". The whole of language forms a living system. Lazarus attempts the metaphor of the "organism" here. The source of language is the spirit of the people in the sense of a historical concretion of the objective spirit. "Every single person receives their language from their people, the individual finds it, he is born in it and for it."⁶⁰ An individual as an isolated single person has no language. Only as one who speaks and understands, only as one bound up in language, does the individual participate in a living linguistic and social process. "Language has to be accompanied by life", according to Lazarus. "Here, in actively speaking and understanding, every single person generates their language, every single person creates their language anew."⁶¹

The generation of language falls within the domain of the individual. As language is, on the one hand, hearing and receiving, there is a receptive aspect of linguistic processes. As language is also actively speaking and understanding, we are dealing with a spontaneity that founds individuality and sociality. The diversity of people and of peoples is manifested in the diversity of their languages. Every language has its own unmistakable "style". A particular manifestation of linguistic style, a clear characteristic of linguistic expression permits conclusions about the individuality of the mind of the speaker. However, here too Lazarus warns of a one-sided view that immediately sets in when we regard language as the mere external aspect of the mind's activity. It is rather that linguistic praxis reacts on the spirit and individuality in the encounter with the world, i. e., is

⁶⁰ Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 401. On p. 404 it is stated as concerns the connection between language and the people: "The language and the genius of a people can survive its people, but no people can survive its language; it then ceases to be of this people because its own peculiar spirit is extinguished." Lazarus sees the cultural strength of the German people in his time as an index of the vitality of the German language which characterizes the particular spirit of the German people. For him the German language is "a 'lively lion'" (p. 406).

⁶¹ Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 403.

formed in the speaking and understanding of another. Through language and in language the human obtains spiritual individuality in the most decisive and effective way while at the same time gaining through it the most highly pronounced form of generality and the most intimate merging with spirit overall.⁶² The Hegelian heritage resonates clearly in Lazarus’ theory of language and culture. Every conception of objective must find an answer to the question, in the shadow of Hegel, of how the formation of living individuality can at the same time be thought as a merging together in a general form. This consideration is directed towards a basic problem of modern societies.⁶³

3.4 The Project of a Natural History of Conversation

The great psychological treatise on language opens the field to far-reaching social and cultural theoretical questions. That is why it can be rightly said that Lazarus prepared the way for the later studies carried out by Wilhelm Dilthey and Georg Simmel and later on by Alfred Schütz. If there is a sentence in his treatise that makes this line of impact clear, then it is the following: “The human being does not possess and speak his language as a single person; the human being is a historical being in his nature as in culture; in all that he strives for, is able to do and achieves, he is related to the history of his ancestors and to contemporaries.”⁶⁴ Moritz Lazarus had himself written a miniature of his cultural theory. This is the lecture entitled *On Conversation [Ueber Gespräche]* that he held on the 24th of February at the scientific association in the Berlin Choral Society.⁶⁵ The text occupies a remarkable position in the long history of reflection on conversation as the paradigm of social interaction.⁶⁶

Lazarus begins his lecture by pointing to a finding that is astonishing. Namely, although conversations constitute a large part of the activities of our life, there is no scientific investigation on the topic of a “natural history of con-

⁶² Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 406.

⁶³ See the continuation of the analysis in Gehlen’s *Die Seele im technischen Zeitalter*.

⁶⁴ Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, p. 400. See by way of example Schütz, *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt*, especially pp. 186–192: “§ 34. Analyse der umweltlichen sozialen Beziehung”.

⁶⁵ Lazarus, “Ueber Gespräche”.

⁶⁶ See the wonderful volume edited by Claudia Schmölders: *Die Kunst des Gesprächs*, in which Moritz Lazarus’ text is also contained.

versation” (and only a few even today⁶⁷). Various reasons can be given for this deficit. Lazarus himself mentions the diversity of our conversations, i.e. the fact that “all conversations [are ...] absolutely individual”.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, not much in our conversations is original but rather shows constant repetition. Nothing can be won either from the side of radical singularity nor from the side of the constant repetition of conversation for a science which is concerned with an analysis of the mind’s activity. That is why, in a natural history of conversation, categorical determinations must be given that would allow an analytical consideration between the poles of spontaneity and mere receptivity in the course of a conversation. According to Lazarus, these criteria are the “object”, the “form”, the sociocultural “constellation”, the participating “persons”, and above all their age, character and level of education.

The possibility of establishing a balance between proximity and distance belongs to the domain of socio-cultural constellation. It is given through the general environmental conditions and the capabilities of the persons participating in the conversation. “The most excellent of conversations, as evidenced by almost all poets, are conducted among total strangers, on journeys, between new acquaintances or between souls fully attuned to one another after long separation [...]”⁶⁹ The content of the conversation can be either inappropriate or fitting, depending on the situation. Jokes, anecdotes, teasing can result in a pleasant – or even unpleasant – mix. Conversations have a different tempo and a different level depending on the intelligence and character of the speaker and the hearers. Lazarus, making reference to a central place in Berlin, points out that the place of a conversation can have a decisive influence on its course. Salon conversations especially show that, besides the balance of proximity and the stranger, of the intimate and the strange, there is a further tension: “there is a breath of equality, there are certain differences.”⁷⁰ There are “light,

67 See Luckmann, “Das Gespräch”, which provides a sketch of the comprehensive problem of a “natural history of human communication” (p. 49).

68 Lazarus, “Ueber Gespräche”, p. 267.

69 Lazarus, “Ueber Gespräche”, p. 272. See also Schleiermacher, “Theorie des geselligen Betragens”, p. 182. Schleiermacher speaks of the chances of a voluntary meeting of dissimilar people to develop to a social form: “When very dissimilar people accidentally – for the most part in public places – are gathered in a space, they do not yet have a commitment, even scarcely an occasion for the idea of wanting to constitute a single community [*Gesellschaft*]. They must be left to the natural life to social crystallization and it depends wholly on them whether they, when one of the lower kind is very isolated through this operation, want to somewhat decrease their social enjoyment for his sake.”

70 Lazarus, “Ueber Gespräche”, p. 274. On this see Schütz, “Der Fremde. Ein sozialpsychologischer Versuch”.

loose, relaxed conversations” under the conditions of successful social interaction but there are also “onerous, rigorously fluent conversations”. Ideally there are “conversations which lead into the depth and the whole” and first disclose to us what the life of the mind is.⁷¹

The project of a natural history of conversation presupposes its conformity to law [*Gesetzmäßigkeit*]. Lazarus is thus also convinced that psychology and psychophysics are those scientific disciplines that can prepare the fundamentals of its analysis.⁷² An illustrative account of a rail journey that he had undertaken in 1862 from Berlin to Paris to see the World Fair provides the material for his further considerations. According to Lazarus, observation shows a lawfulness in the specific course of almost all conversations. What we call the freedom of the spirit is restricted to “rare occasions”. As a rule, discussions are dictated by habit and by a “mechanism of psychic activity”. What articulates itself as free will means nothing more than an occasional, extremely rare taking of distance. To put it otherwise: psychology and psychophysics render predictable the course of most of the conversations we have every day. The prediction rests (and not only in this instance) on a strict determinism concerning human nature. Yet Lazarus thinks that a creative possibility is lodged in every conversational situation. He appeals to the generation of language and with it to the creative shaping of an encounter in which the individuality of the persons participating in the discussions shows itself for a moment and moulds new forms of togetherness. When this is the case, isolated individuality and mechanistic generality recede into the background and we ascend the ladder of conversation at whose beginning stands schematic or isolated talks that follow one another “like grains of sand in an hourglass”. We proceed up to “crystalline formations” and finally arrive at that organic growth in which each matter that comes from outside enters into the plastic form of lively relation.⁷³

A limit case of conversation is silence. However, it is not a limit case of language itself insofar as we often think in “silent words”, thus exclusively in the

71 Lazarus, “Ueber Gespräche”, p. 275: “Conversations which lead us to the depth and to the whole, to the whole of one’s own life or of one’s own people, its purpose, its definition, its hopes; or to the whole of humanity or the whole of time and temporality and its many unquestioned [*umfragten*] relations, to the infinite, to the eternal. Those are conversations which raise the human being to its own height, which give him a place on which his own I had not previously stood. Whoever has not taken part in such conversations does not really know what spiritual life is.”

72 Recent research goes beyond this to the “genetic determination” of physiological and psychological functions. See Luckmann, “Das Gespräch”, pp. 50 ff.

73 Lazarus, “Ueber Gespräche”, p. 273. Compare to the individual metaphorical expressions in Schleiermacher, “Theorie des geselligen Betragens”, especially p. 182.

inner form of language. Nonetheless thinking in the external form of language is the most common and this corresponds to our social nature. Lazarus sums this thought up as “talk is nature, silence is art”. Language serves a natural striving towards clarity of thought that starts at the “threshold of consciousness” and extends to articulated talk.⁷⁴ The beginning of all speaking is unconscious. This unchosen urge is also the basis of all sociability – and when he argues against not confusing cause and effect here, Lazarus stands in conspicuous proximity to Schleiermacher.⁷⁵

Real life presents examples that illustrate this connection. Lazarus describes the situation of solitude that is broken up by the arrival of the other. We articulate the expression of common feeling in language and thus refer ourselves to an overall sense of our embodied condition.⁷⁶ We give “involuntary expression” to our actuality. Lazarus can, in this regard, lead conversation back to the efficacy of a “psychical mechanism”. General lawfulness in social interactions, as for example in a conversation, however, is no objection to the principle of individuality. It is rather that the general lawfulness of the reproduction of feelings, moods and thoughts in language is the condition “for a hundred different conversations being conducted and a hundred different stories narrated. This is the relationship between generality and individuality in the lawfulness of all psychical life.”⁷⁷

It is in conversation that the problem of the individual emerges with all its acuteness. The outlined general interrelation of generality and individuality does not provide, according to Lazarus, a solution to the problem of individuality but merely the indication of a problem. In the face of the general lawfulness in conversation, the possibility of differentiation depends not on the mere intention of the participants but rather “how their conversation, according to the same necessary lawfulness, is nevertheless differently shaped depends on the whole background of the humans”.⁷⁸ Individuality has nothing to do with wishes

74 Lazarus, “Ueber Gespräche”, p. 278.

75 Lazarus, “Ueber Gespräche”, pp. 278–279: “The essential is that we speak under the condition of favouring the social being together with others; but in not as if the social drive alone was the cause of our speaking but rather also inversely: because we want to speak and must speak, only thus are we social.” See Schleiermacher, *Dialektik* [1822], § 2, pp. 16–19, that departs from the individual and his linguistic circle as a “seed” which first expands to social life.

76 See also Schleiermacher, *Dialektik* [1822], § 1, pp. 5–8, which emphasizes the physical side in the encounter and the physical effect of linguistic sound. It is in this context that the thought of “embodiment” is first formulated in linguistic and cultural theory.

77 Lazarus, “Ueber Gespräche”, p. 282.

78 Lazarus, “Ueber Gespräche”, p. 284. It states further that conversations are “an excellent touchstone of education [*ein vorzüglicher Prüfstein der Bildung*]”.

and wants but with the strenuous work of self-education. A mastery of psycho-physical mechanism is wholly impossible without this presupposition. In addition to individual capability, social conditions, the constellation of whole classes, has a significance that can hardly be overestimated. Much in the relationship among individuals and between social groupings is a question of “style”.

A further limit case of conversation is “rumour”. According to Lazarus, there is a natural course of conversations according to which they never stop at the facts but continue to rise through assessments up to general principles. The contradiction between the principle and the actual world emerges on this path. The most serious conversations too, those in which the participants are concerned with the discursive intention, undergo a turn to phantasy. In addition to this is an adjoining problem, i.e., the changeover of a conversation into mere gossip. All these risks are known to Lazarus and he advocated that they be comprehensively analysed in a natural history of conversation. In addition, however, the central impact of conversation must be taken into consideration, an impact which can be found residing in the “activities of life” and as “witnessing or co-experiencing” in the world.⁷⁹ Speaking and hearing are movements of an interior to an exterior, and vice versa. They are activities in which the encounter with others and with oneself is realized. Language and society, and with this the social institutions of justice, science and so on, are ultimately constituted in this process of movement and formation.

Conversation as the form of speaking and hearing is the privileged place at which “real, natural, flowering, actual life” takes place.⁸⁰ Conversations secure public meaning and are the place of its critical revision. However, one moment extends beyond these functional determinations. In successful conversation there is “an immediate experience or at least an inkling of every great and spiritual fact of the historical process of life”. Because of this and because we cannot expect any more, under the preconditions of a secular understanding of the world, than that in encountering other human beings we bring the sense of our lives, above all the historical dimension of an ambivalent past and an open future closer to determinability, Lazarus wishes his contemporaries “that the air that we breathe in conversation be pure and free!”⁸¹

⁷⁹ Lazarus, “Ueber Gespräche”, p. 289.

⁸⁰ Lazarus, “Ueber Gespräche”, p. 291: “The spirit of the people lives with its language in speaking.” It is astonishing to compare Lazarus’s description of the conversational situation, rich in phenomena, with the barren sociolinguistic determination of conversation as a “synonym for face-to-face communication”. See Luckmann, “Das Gespräch”, p. 56.

⁸¹ Lazarus, “Ueber Gespräche”, p. 295.

4 ‘The Peace of Humour’ – Hermann Cohen

Humour [...] is the religion of the spirit.
(Moritz Lazarus)¹

While the work of the philosopher Hermann Cohen is well-known, its significance is far from having been exhausted. Two aspects of his work and its impact are widely known and were expressed in two editions of his writings from the 1920s. These are the three-volume *Jewish Writings [Jüdischen Schriften]* (1924), edited by Franz Rosenzweig and the two volume *Writings on Philosophy and Contemporary History [Schriften zur Philosophie und Zeitgeschichte]* (Berlin 1928), issued by Ernst Cassirer and Albert Görland. Cohen is primarily known as the representative of Neo-Kantianism and is an established fixture of an anthologies on this topic.² The “Jewish background of Hermann Cohen’s philosophy” has, since Franz Rosenzweig, been repeatedly examined and also often greatly emphasized.³

Going into these suppositions would conflict with the idea behind of this study as outlined in the introduction. And at no point in his extensive work does Cohen distinguish between the foreground and the background of his philosophy. His essays on *Germanness and Judaism [Deutschtum und Judentum]* and on the relationship between Kantian philosophy and Judaism speak only of

1 Lazarus, “Der Humor als psychologisches Phänomen”, p. 199.

2 See Holzhey (ed.), *Der Marburger Neukantianismus in Quellen*, Vol. 2; Ollig (ed.), *Materialien zur Neukantianismus-Diskussion*; Holzhey and Orth (ed.), *Neukantianismus*, Vol. 1; Holzhey (ed.), *Hermann Cohen*; Holzhey, Motzkin and Wiedebach (eds.), “*Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*”. In “Der systematische Ort der ‘Religion der Vernunft’ im Gesamtwerk Hermann Cohens”, on p. 38, Helmut Holzhey writes that: “the ‘Opus Postumum’ was the property of modern Jewish thinking, the interpretation of Kant and the philosophical system were explained to be an integral part of academic philosophy in the Germany of Wilhelm. Thus this [separation] was conducted on both sides of the delimitation. [...] A clear sign sets the division of Cohen’s shorter writings into those on Judaism and those on philosophy and contemporary history.”

3 Julius Guttman’s *Die Philosophie des Judentums* is certainly a pioneering work in this regard. See p. 345: “The reviver of Jewish philosophy of religion was Hermann Cohen (1842–1918), the head of the Marburg School of neo-Kantianism. The tendency to put into effect the philosophical basis for Judaism with Kant’s ethico-theology, a tendency that was present in Jewish circles for the whole of the 19th century and which spread with the return of German philosophy to Kant, found its first systematic realization in his work.” See also Albertini, *Das Verständnis des Seins bei Hermann Cohen*; Adelman: “*Reinige dein Denken*”.

“inner relationships” which require explication. But no reference is needed to backgrounds that escape the view of the competent reader.⁴

In what follows, one of Cohen's ideas will be brought out and interpreted in the context of his work, namely, the idea of peace, in its particular form as the *peace of humour*. My intention is to understand the surprising idea that not only, according to Cohen, is the aim of humanity to be found in peace – which is not a new idea and thus the well-known aspect of the idea – but furthermore that human humour is an anticipation *within time* of this aim at the end of time.

4.1 The World-history of the Spirit and the Peace of Humour

Hermann Cohen tries to put forward a conception of systematic philosophizing in spite of the failure of the great systematic philosophies.⁵ His “system” is composed of studies on logic, ethics, aesthetics and the philosophy of religion. Working against the backdrop of Kantian philosophy, the differentiations of the cultural world are discussed and moved into a holistic perspective. A disputed question in the secondary literature is that of whether Cohen completed a “system” of philosophy within the limits of Kantian philosophy or whether he overstepped these limits in favour of a laying the groundwork for the projected holistic perspective. The dispute concerns the significance of Cohen's “Opus Postumum”, the treatise *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism* [*Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*] which appeared in 1919. In the background of all of this is the question of whether Cohen is an academic philosopher and representative of Marburg Neo-Kantianism or whether he is essentially a Jewish philosopher. This controversial issue must be categorically bracketed in the following because it might distract us from the arguments and options that Cohen opens up for the reader on cultural theory.⁶

Cohen takes his reader on a journey through Western intellectual and cultural history. He recognizes in the historical overview, as his teacher Trendelenburg had before, a struggle between philosophical positions.⁷ Cohen recognizes a for-

4 See Mendes-Flohr, “Neue Richtungen im jüdischen Denken”.

5 As background see Hartung, “Wozu Ethische Untersuchungen? Trendelenburgs Grundlegung einer Theorie der menschlichen Welt”.

6 I am referring here to the these established by Julius Guttmann: *Die Philosophie des Judentums*, p. 345: “Cohen resolves this task [that of a philosophical founding of Judaism] in the context of his philosophical system, the concept of the religion of reason continually grows and develops from out of his founding of ethics, whose historical realization he recognizes in Judaism.”

7 See Trendelenburg, “Ueber den Grundunterschied der philosophischen Systeme”.

mative principle in this struggle. He develops this as the idea of a “pure, creative consciousness” of the intellectual and moral world. This idea goes together with a warning against all materialistic reductionisms.⁸ One of the most demanding questions of Cohen’s philosophy is that of how to adequately understand this idea of “creation”. To do this question justice, we must try to not prematurely narrow the perspective of our discussion and supply hasty answers. Such a narrowing down occurs when Cohen’s thinking is inscribed in the constellation of idealism versus materialism (or of that between Kantian and Judaic thinking). For the question concerning the materiality of our thinking is not simply faded out, as idealistic approaches typically do. His theory is an integrative approach, that is to say he includes the materialist standpoint. This way of laying things out is especially evident at the boundary between anthropology and ethics.

The large introduction to the *Ethics of the Pure Will* [*Ethik des reinen Willens*] (second edition: 1907) informs us as to Cohen’s programme. What is at issue is the human, the concept of which is to be first worked out in ethics. Cohen’s ethics differs from (almost) all 20th century ethics in that it does not naively take it as self-evident that we already know what discourse is about when it discusses the human. Cohen first calls us to join in the discovery of the concept of the human. The discovery begins with the image of the single individual being that is human. As an individual, the being that is human shows itself within the limits of its natural and social environment, that is, within the confines of the “majority”. At the same time an “ambiguity” becomes evident in every relationship between being particular and being within the majority that refers back to a fundamental independence of single individuals. This independence returns in respectively different forms throughout the different stages, from particularity to the majority and allness [*Allheit*], all the way to unity. The single individual does not merge without remainder into the majority. The individual asserts himself or herself against the claim of universality. In any case, this happens as long as this majority remains a particular, and thereby only a determinately encountered majority. A dynamic of “transformations and stages in the development of the concept of the human” develops from this ambiguity. This development leads beyond the majority to the “allness” which is in the form of “all at once, all in one”.⁹ However, allness itself has stages of development leading up to the “veritable unity”, humanity. Only in this last unity is the individual “human”. Only here does human development conclude and only here is its being revealed.

⁸ Cohen, *Ethik des reinen Willens*, p. 39.

⁹ Cohen, *Ethik des reinen Willens*, p. 7.

Cohen's anthropology is integrated in his ethics. The ambiguity of human nature is only made explicit in the anthropological terms, which is by no means beyond biological determination of the human but is also not absorbed into it. The reference to the allness of the human is a warning, Cohen emphasizes, against any naturalistic levelling down in philosophical debates. For the "basic error in every materialist rallying cry" is that

spirit is altogether denied. [...] Then, however, it is uncritically claimed nature itself, from its soil and its climate, brought the human together with those images which are the plaything of the human world. This materialistic and naturalistic view of history thus only reveals itself as the annulment of history. For history, as the history of the human and its works and deeds, is the history of spirit and of ideas; or rather: there would be no world-history, but only natural history.¹⁰

For Cohen, however, this cannot be the case. That is why ethics assumes a fundamental function for the determination of the human world. It stands against the naturalistic levelling down, in that the anthropological turn in philosophy – in the sense of a bidding of farewell to historical philosophy – is flanked by ethical philosophy. It does this by pointing out that a determination of the human in the universality of an anthropological definition misses both the moments of individuality and of humanity as well. Ethics expands on the correlation of these moments, the virtue of humanity builds the bridge. It enables individual activity in regard to the unity of true veritable humanity and it also liberates collective activity from naturalism (in nationalism and in the "atavism of the instincts of the race") that discharges itself under the protective cloak of ostensible religious or patriotic feelings.¹¹

Humankind realizes humanity. Humanity is a critical corrective against one-sided judgments and a signpost to a dissolution of rigidified limits of character. Only free movement in the human character produces a universalism of considerateness and thus gathering, concord and peace. This ethical aim correlates with an aesthetic measure of unanimity and harmony. The elimination of the "dryness and stiffness of the moral being" at the same time advances the vitality of moral activity. Cohen speaks here of a "limit notion of ethics" that points us towards the domain of the aesthetic. Only here do we find the harmony, the security and stability in judgment that articulates itself in the "appropriate tact".¹² Human feeling [*Menschengefühl*] is awakened by humanity and which can be

¹⁰ Cohen, *Ethik des reinen Willens*, p. 39.

¹¹ Cohen, *Ethik des reinen Willens*, pp. 628–630.

¹² Cohen, *Ethik des reinen Willens*, p. 633. See Chapter 5 below.

lived as an aesthetic feeling in the productivity of spirit. Cohen remarks, drawing on Schiller, the game of the spirit is not child's play. For what is at stake is a liberation from nature, from the advantages, from the interests, from all the particularities of the human world and its idealization in aesthetic feeling.¹³ This is an event that Cohen formulates as a *world-history of the spirit*.

In considering Cohen's intellectual career, it does not make sense to talk of a moment of discontinuity between the preoccupation with Kant's philosophy and the later studies of the philosophy of religion. In Cohen, the path always led from logic, through psychology to ethics and from there to aesthetics and religion. What is at stake is the working out of a philosophical concept of the human.¹⁴ The 'Opus postumum' is located within this movement¹⁵ and represents a deepening of the "correlation" between ethics and philosophy of religion, a correlation that was previously only implied.¹⁶

Leo Strauss has already spoken of the ambivalence of this work. On one hand, he writes, the thematization of religion transcends ethics, to which it cannot be reduced; on the other it remains dependent on the method of ethics. The connecting element is the thought of correlation because the correlation between individual and humanity is sidelined by that between humanity and God.¹⁷ However, a "self-relatedness-to" between the human being and the fellow human, individual and the humankind, or humanity and God is only clarified in formal way. It serves as no more than a formal indication of the determinability involved, and not as the determination itself. The question of the form of the relationship of correlation can assume for human beings remains at this stage unex-

13 Cf. the concluding remarks in Cohen, *Ethik des reinen Willens*, pp. 634–637.

14 See Cohen, *Der Begriff der Religion im System der Philosophie*.

15 For the historical background and a clear introduction to this see Karl Löwith's "Philosophie der Vernunft und Religion der Offenbarung in Hermann Cohens Religionsphilosophie".

16 See Alexander Altmann's analytic conceptual explanation in "Hermann Cohens Begriff der Korrelation". His discussion is unrivalled in its clarity.

17 See Strauss, "Introductory Essay to Hermann Cohen, *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism*", p. 272: "Correlation means therefore also and especially that God and man are equally, if in different ways, active toward one another." On this see also Löwith, "Philosophie der Vernunft und Religion der Offenbarung in Hermann Cohens Religionsphilosophie", p. 344: "Cohen fundamental concept of 'correlation' between God and man does not only connect both reciprocally but their unbridgeable distance is preserved in this connection. [...] The correlation between God and man is reflects in that of human being and human being because, as God loves the human, so the human being – in God – love all others as its fellows."

plained. Ernst Cassirer treats the theme of a correlation between individual and humanity in a similar way in his architectonic of the symbolic order.¹⁸

For this reason, the relationship of correlation must not be misunderstood as having the sense of a pre-established harmony. On the contrary, it is evident in Cohen's work that the domains of the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious stand in a state of tension with regard to one another. Cohen refers to a striking contrast in his philosophy of religion: An "anomaly" shows itself in the relationship between prophetic religion and art that points to the fundamental opposition between the monotheistic spirit and human consciousness that creates images of natural things.¹⁹ This relation is clear in the Prophet Isaiah's radicalization of the religious prophecy, a radicalization that is accompanied by the disappearance of the idolatry as well as shame concerning the veneration of images. Shame is, as it were, the last refuge of the idolater. "Confounded be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols." (Psalm 97,7, King James Bible) In Cohen's view, the monotheistic spirit demands the renunciation of images. This has consequences for anthropological reflection which surpass the limits of aesthetics and ethics and which uncover a fundamental problem for the philosophy of religion. What is addressed is the "monotheistic concept of the human" which can only originate in independence from the plastic concepts of God and the human.²⁰

The monotheistic concept of the human is the realized form of the correlation between the human being and God. It does not depend on the material side of the relationship nor on its taking the shape of equality but rather on the form, which implies a relationality in correspondence. The correlation between God and the human being is "the fundamental equation of religion",²¹ it is the "norm of monotheism".²² Here too a development takes place like that previously seen in the domain of anthropology and ethics. This path leads from individuality to unity. From the initially implied correlation between human being and human being, the correlation between God and the human

18 Albertini has worked out the significance of the "fellow human" as the central point of the correlation between God and man for Cohen in *Das Verständnis des Seins bei Hermann Cohen*, Chapter 4, pp. 129 – 187. See also on Cassirer, Hartung, *Maß des Menschen*, pp. 224 – 240 and 343 – 356.

19 See Cohen, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, p. 62.

20 See Cohen, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, p. 67.

21 See Cohen, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, p. 132.

22 See Strauss, "Introductory Essay to Hermann Cohen, *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism*", p. 275: "The Correlation between God and man is above all the correlation between God and the individual; the absolute individual, 'the seeing individual', is man standing before God."

being emerges.²³ And that also works retroactively: the human being is only a “fellow human being” [*Mitmensch*] in correlation with God.²⁴ While polytheism strives towards the deification of the human and accordingly speaks of a dangerous boundlessness [*Entgrenzung*], monotheistic people call for correlation and with this the recognition of and love for fellow humans.²⁵

These considerations are not astonishing, for at first glance they refer to a connection already well known in Protestant philosophy and sociology of religion, namely, that between ethical rigorism and prophetic religiosity. Here it seems that a constellation is being addressed which Max Weber had highlighted in his influential *Sociology of Religion* [*Religionssoziologie*].²⁶ However, while Weber had considered the demand of monotheism in the light of a rigorous rationalization of the ethical way of life, what is at issue for Cohen here is different. On his view, prophetic disclosure is neither defined through rigorous demands in the sense of Weberian puritanism nor through satirically exposing and questioning shame in the manner of Heinrich Heine. Prophetic discourse is rather the expression of a relation to the world that can only be taken as “serenity” and which is expressed from the depths of correlation. In the words of the Prophet Isaiah: “Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?” (Isaiah 2.20 – 22, King James Bible). These words imply that here we see “only humour [that judges], with serenity and gentleness [and this] itself is a basic power of aesthetic consciousness”. And as so often “Isaiah can recognize this humour enormously.”²⁷

To avoid any misunderstanding: humour of the prophets concerns a question of style (“Hamlet style”) which, however, is not separate from the search for truth.²⁸ Cohen emphasizes that the truth of monotheism is established on the truthfulness of thinking and acting. Moreover, truthfulness is the backbone

23 See Lazarus, *Das Leben der Seele*, Vol. 2, pp. 129 – 130.

24 Helmut Holzhey shows in an impressive what Cohen’s “turn to the concrete human being” means. See the “Introduction” in Holzhey (ed.), *Hermann Cohen*, p. 18.

25 See Cohen, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, p. 393.

26 See Max Weber, “Religionssoziologie”, § 1 and § 4 in his *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, p. 257 and 271. See also Wellhausen, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels*, p. 416. On the historical background see Hartung, *Die Naturrechtsdebatte*, pp. 309 – 321.

27 See Cohen, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, p. 64. See Lazarus, “Der Humor als psychologisches Phänomen”; on p. 253, Cohen draws a fundamental distinction between satire and humour: “Satire grumbles by using laughter, humour cries; satire shed bile, when it shakes the diaphragm, humour tears; you could almost say that satire curses and humour prays.”

28 Cohen, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, p. 317; compare his *Ethik des reinen Willens*, pp. 617 ff.

of moral human beings and there is in the truthfulness, founded in the Judaic consciousness of God, a vital force whose effect on life in this world and survival can scarcely be overestimated. The truthfulness of the Judaic consciousness of God is the basis of the resistance to the plastic forms of the divine and the human and to the divinization of the material that is expressed by the prohibition of images. The inner shame of the idolater is thus also not an expression of the rejection of a truthful life but is rather the symptom of the truthfulness that is itself sensed. The prophets had recognized this and for this reason they take shame as an indication of the efficacy of the correlation between the human being and God even in their worst misalignment.²⁹

Prophetic truthfulness shows itself in its unconditioned faith in human beings and in the certainty that the human being can only truly be by the truth of its God. But it also shows itself in its dealings with others. On Cohen's view the transition from monotheism to Messianism transforms the single, chosen people into humanity itself. Without this self-transformation of the chosen people into messianic humanity, Judaic truthfulness could hardly be maintained. Thus this truthfulness shows itself in patience with others, in insight into their weaknesses and in the recognition of human differences.

In the literature of the Psalms, this truthfulness, aimed at humanity itself, is the ground from the primordial power of the lyrics is created.³⁰ The strongest motive of the Psalms is the peace of God because what is at stake is humanity itself and the overcoming of particularity.³¹ God's peace is the highest archetype of human morality and the healing power of prophecy. It is grounded on knowledge, i. e. on the study of the Torah. However, this study is also, as Cohen stresses, joined to festive joy. This joy is also an intellectual joy, grounded in the spirit and distinct from sensual delirium, from aesthetic deception, from compensatory magic. Cohen adds that the Jew is raised up to the heaven of joy through his

29 See Freud, *Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion*, in particular essay III, Part II, Section C, pp. 557–561, English translation: *Moses and Monotheism*, p. 178. The advancement of spirituality. Freud writes here (p. 559) that in the rules of Mosaic religion there is one rule whose significance for cultural history (and not only for the people of Israel) had scarcely be overstated. "It is the prohibition against making an image of God, which means the compulsion to worship an invisible God. [...] If this prohibition was accepted, however, it was bound to exercise a profound effect. For it signifies subordinating sense perception to an abstract idea; it was a triumph of spirituality over the senses [...]" On this see also Assmann, *Die Mosaische Unterscheidung*. Chapter 4: "Sigmund Freud und der Fortschritt in der Geistigkeit", pp. 121–143.

30 Cohen, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, p. 486.

31 Cohen, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, pp. 515 ff.

festivals and his scientific nature. "His martyrdom gave him tragic dignity; but his peace was always received in aesthetic humour."³²

On Cohen's view it is thus undoubtedly an "aesthetic power" that overcomes enchantment. It breaks into the life-world with the prophets and defines the later Judaic literature of the West. Several moments come together in literature, moments that can be uncovered in psychological and aesthetic analysis. Despite the differentiation of all of these moments, Cohen sees a common foundation that he recognizes in the certitude [*Gewissheit*] of a correlation between God and the human being, a certitude that expresses itself in theoretical and practical conduct in the world. This conduct within the world, in its ideal form, freely expresses the "peace of humour", as we see in the example of the great prophets.

4.2 Moritz Lazarus' Psychology of Humour

In his comments on humour, Hermann Cohen was able to refer to Moritz Lazarus who, in his great study *The Life of the Soul in Monographs on its Phenomena and Laws* [*Das Leben der Seele in Monographien über seine Erscheinungen und Gesetze*] (1856) also made a whole series of excellent observations on the psychology of humour.³³ Because there is an astonishing proximity between these considerations and those of Cohen, I will now consider a second Moritz Lazarus, a psychologist of humour.

For Lazarus, what is at issue is the "essence" of humour. His consideration of this is merely aesthetic because he regards humour as "a worldview of its own" [*eine eigene Weltanschauung*] and not just a particular art form.³⁴ Guided by Hegelian philosophy, Lazarus outlines a phenomenology of worldviews. The first stage of worldview is the sensible. He also calls this the "empirical worldview", whose constriction is to be seen in materialism. The second stage is the "reasonable conception of life" [*Lebensauffassung*], which arrives at the coherence and order of its elements. The corresponding theoretical concept is obviously a reign of the understanding in Fichte's sense. Beyond this is the third stage, the "rational or philosophical worldview" where universal ideas direct

³² Cohen, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, p. 530.

³³ Lazarus, "Der Humor als psychologisches Phänomen".

³⁴ Lazarus, "Der Humor als psychologisches Phänomen", p. 181.

life. In Lazarus' conception this correlates with a religious worldview. This stage is included in the worldview of subjective idealism.³⁵

The question of how thoughts and feelings are related to one another is of psychological interest to Lazarus. For it is not only in thought that the world differs for every individual but also in feeling.³⁶ Humour plays a particular role in mediating between these positions. It immediately connects to the rational worldview, with thought, insofar it emphasizes, with philosophical clarity, the idea as the essential, spirit as the creator in humans and in the world. Humour also, however, "includes" – and that constitutes the difference to philosophy – "and also holds to and cherishes the finite and the sensible with that fresh and full immediacy of the sensible worldview and indeed through feeling".³⁷ Humour is an ambivalent expressive phenomenon because, on one hand, it takes us from the level of ideal intuition to the nitty gritty of sensibility but, on the other hand, in humour we overstep the current reality. "[T]he humourist not only sees the future, into the established foundation of the ideal; he also likes to look into another world."³⁸ Only in this way is it possible for Lazarus to see the descent to the region of the sensible, material, the coarse and real as not indicating a lowering of the standard or an absorbing of the individual in a bad universality. Humour remains individual and is not the "common property of a people", "humour [...] always pertains only to individuals, standing at the highest stage of formation [*Bildung*]."³⁹

Lazarus' conception of humour is a *cultural theory in miniature*. He emphasizes over and over again a reserve of individuality with regard to universality, be it the "national spirit" or the "life of the people". Humour is a moving principle of individual life, it is the "worldview of individuals". No moral organization of tactical existence, no embossing of sociality arises from humour. Humour is lack-

35 Lazarus, "Der Humor als psychologisches Phänomen", pp. 190–194. Lazarus adds (p. 195): These four *Weltanschauungen* are the "four elements of spiritual life, and the entire history of human development cannot exhibit any other products but that which arises from them and their being mixed together".

36 Schleiermacher's influence on Lazarus's conception of individuality is unmistakable and does not first become visible through Dilthey's works. See Schleiermacher, "Über die Religion – Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern", Second talk, p. 210: "and in spiritual things the originality is not for you to be created otherwise, than as if it were generated through an original creation in you and even then only for the moment that you created it."

37 Lazarus, "Der Humor als psychologisches Phänomen", pp. 195–196.

38 Lazarus, "Der Humor als psychologisches Phänomen", pp. 196–197.

39 Lazarus, "Der Humor als psychologisches Phänomen", p. 197.

ing any practical evidence for it is purely theoretical energy: "Humour [...] is the religion of the spirit."⁴⁰

Lazarus refers to the theologian Schleiermacher who had, quite rightly in Lazarus' view, characterized religion as the sense and taste for the infinite.⁴¹ This taste for the infinite also shows itself in humour. "This happens, in that in humour the spirit relates itself to the idea and to actuality in the same way as the whole human soul in religion to God and the world."⁴² In Lazarus, the relationship between religion and humour is rich in tension and revealing precisely because of this. For on the one hand religion is, in Schleiermacher's sense, the deepest human feeling of incompleteness. But this is only at the stage of sensibility. Lazarus recognizes a romantic impulse here and a persisting in the sentimentality of bad universality, as Hegel had already critically remarked. Religion is not only this dismal feeling of dependence and incompleteness but on the other side, as the "religion of the spirit", religion is an expression of "spirit's own nature" when the human spirit is not "volatized in dark forebodings" and not "opposed in the law and measure of its life from the outside".⁴³

The importance of this idea for anthropological and cultural-theoretical reflection in modernity can scarcely be overestimated. Lazarus here formulates a conception of individuality that, besides language, law and morality, is able to integrate other human forms of expression thus revealing every human being's achievement of objectification and detachment with regard to its natural and social environment. Humour is the most powerful capacity for detachment. Because it forms a bridge to an open future it enables every individual to deal with the conflict between idea and sensibility in the realities of life. This also allows the individual to endure his incomplete life because, for a moment, he wins a distance that a possible wholeness of individual life can appear. "The depth of humour", says Lazarus, "is the depth of the human being in its entirety."⁴⁴

To show the depth of humour is the foremost task of literature. Lazarus sees Heinrich Heine's texts, especially his satirical depictions, as having achieved a

40 Lazarus, "Der Humor als psychologisches Phänomen", p. 199.

41 See Schleiermacher, "Über die Religion – Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern", pp. 206–247.

42 Lazarus: "Der Humor als psychologisches Phänomen", p. 200.

43 Lazarus, "Der Humor als psychologisches Phänomen", p. 201. He continues: "Only when humour turns to religion and it ascends from the sublime idea of humanity to the idea of God, only then does the most splendid psychological drama unfold."

44 Lazarus, "Der Humor als psychologisches Phänomen", p. 202.

degree of linguistic perfection.⁴⁵ Heine's art consists in its ability to give the reader a notion of the sublime and of exalted ideas which he, however, suddenly thwarts in emphasizing his own weakness thus mocking the ideal of a life in accordance with sublime notions; "we see the snag [*Pferdefuß*] and have no laugh, and no tear and no word, as only a silent: get thee hence!"⁴⁶ There is actually no reason to laugh, as the reference to Matthew 4.10 indicates.⁴⁷ Deep humour remains silent. It remains silent because it is accompanied by the certitude that the fundamental oppositions that define each individual life cannot be sublated but merely bridged.

Humour contrasts with the scientific world, in that in the former opposites are not separated from one another but coexist. "God and world, light and darkness, Ormus and Ahriman are neighbours [*Wandnachbarn*] the chambers of the humour's heart and brain."⁴⁸ Humour not only remains silent but is creative in its focus on the universally-human. It aims at the idea of humanity and at the same time clings to human detail, natural expression and simple gestures.⁴⁹ What is at stake in humour, as Lazarus depicts it, is nothing less than a "knowledge of the human". It is distinguished from scientific analysis precisely by the fact that it neither neatly separates nor sublates oppositions. Knowledge of the human, as presented in humour, lets light coexist next to shadow, freedom next to necessity, strength next to weakness, fulfilment next to suffering.

In his psychological *description* of humour Lazarus never tires of saying that humour does not articulate itself in frivolous laughter. The ambivalence of individual life, that cannot be sublated into the life of the species or of the people, calls for an ambivalent expression.⁵⁰ Hence Lazarus' *psychological explanation* of

45 Lazarus, "Der Humor als psychologisches Phänomen", p. 206: "Heine is perhaps the most eloquent and smooth tongue in the German idiom, his style is thoroughly unique, clear and sharp, striking and spirited, sensual and thoughtful at the same time."

46 Lazarus, "Der Humor als psychologisches Phänomen", p. 208.

47 See the Gospel according to Matthew, Chapter 4, Verse 10: "Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."

48 Lazarus, "Der Humor als psychologisches Phänomen", p. 210.

49 Lazarus, "Der Humor als psychologisches Phänomen", pp. 211–213: "Because humour wants to comprehend the whole human being and the whole of the human, as the idea, indeed, shows, it cherishes and loves the simple, natural, small, which would perish in the rough sea of advanced education [...]. And humour has been misrecognized when on account of the description of small lives it has been accused of pettiness. The vantage point from which humour looks upon the small has not been recognised and this vantage point is, in fact, the entirety and greatness of humanity, its very idea."

50 Lazarus, "Der Humor als psychologisches Phänomen", p. 215. The basic idea here holds of literature but also of other artistic forms of expression: "Even in the depiction of individual

humour leads to the claim that what is at stake in a serious analysis is just the contrast between reality and the world of ideas and to prove that no region prevails over the other. In the face of an irrevocability [*Unaufhebbarkeit*] of this fundamental difference, we recognize a state of the soul and a tendency of the spirit that merits the name “humour” and we recognize it in the human individual, and only in the human individual.⁵¹ This state of the soul can be differentiated once again into the tragic, comic and absolute humour. A progression can be recognized here, insofar as the tragic and the comic moment emphasize strongly the aspect of failure (either with respect to the idea or reality). It is also the case, however, that a tendency of the spirit seems to be possible which would imply a balance of powers (and not their sublation in a higher synthesis).

It is in this sense that that Lazarus speaks at one point of absolute humour. This is the existential point “where neither victory nor defeat appears but rather a glorious and just peace, a thousand year heavenly kingdom”.⁵² In his psychological analysis of humour Lazarus provides us with – and that is the real point of his depiction – a psychology of Messianism whose proximity to Cohen’s reflections is unmistakable.

4.3 On the Nature of Human Beings and the Human Beings in Nature

To see this proximity between Cohen and Lazarus’ conceptions more precisely, a further detour is necessary which takes into consideration Cohen’s aesthetic theory from the particular point of view of his theory of humour. Cohen’s aesthetic theory is a theory of human nature. At the centre of this theory is the reconstruction of a concept of experience, a reconstruction which secures his understanding of human nature against naturalistic reductionism in particular.⁵³ He is of the decided opinion that our discourse concerning the nature of human beings is not to be formulated in the language of a pre-Kantian ontology but is compelled to deal with nature as the world of appearances and as the human environment. “Human nature has come to knowledge as pure creation. That nature

life, humour’s laughter is rarely painless; for the sharp eye of its wit always sees weakness and suffering.”

⁵¹ See Freud’s concise discussion of the interpretation of this fundamental difference as one of that [solchen] between the “ego” and “superego” in “Der Humour” in his *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewußten/Der Humor*, pp. 253–258.

⁵² Lazarus “Der Humor als psychologisches Phänomen”, p. 219.

⁵³ Cohen, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, Vol 1.

of the human, that is the human of nature. Nature becomes the appendage of the human being, as it is his or her surroundings, his or her environment for his or her inner world. His or her body is a part of this environment."⁵⁴

Nature seen as a pure creation is not a given but the result of a creative act. The object of experience is formed in every moment of experience. Nature is such to the environment of the human. It shows a dual aspect for human nature that does not only have an external side (nature, that is only the "appendage") but also an internal side (the body). For Cohen this is of interest in two respects: the elaboration of the dual aspect and its unity in aesthetic feeling. From the theory of sensualism, he takes the notion that in aesthetic feeling the unity of nature and the natural in the human are referred to the exterior of the figure. However, he signals his idealistic standpoint in leading this unity back to a creation in pure feeling so as to think the unity, which is not just exterior, in its absolute originality. With regard to pure feeling, the point of origin as such must be in inwardness insofar as it is "creative love."⁵⁵

Cohen thinks of pure feeling, creative love as original and, this is the point, as processual. This means that feeling is constitutive for the I but it never constitutes the entirety of its makeup. It remains, as the Herbartian Cohen says, the "infinite task of the I",⁵⁶ that the fundamental aesthetic power stands ready in the religion as a feeling of the infinite (this is a reference to Schleiermacher). "The infinite can be thought and can be willed; where it is felt, there the aesthetic consciousness prevails."⁵⁷

Cohen leaves no doubt in his aesthetic theory too that the individual threads of his logical, ethical and aesthetic investigation must be brought together with regard to the basic anthropological question concerning the correlation of the human and God. Because the individual constitutes itself in respect to the infinite and because the process of constitution in thinking (logic), willing (ethics) and in feeling (aesthetics) is itself infinite, all "artistic creation" must be a going back to the ur-feeling of the individual, its "ur-movement".⁵⁸ Objectification shows itself in artistic creation as a necessary feature of the aesthetic subject, because one's own creation is coupled with the creation of a work of art and thereby a correlation between the subject and object is effected; "the objectification must go over into the object."⁵⁹

54 Cohen, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, Vol. 1, p. 191.

55 Cohen, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, Vol. 1, p. 193.

56 Cohen, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, Vol. 1, p. 196.

57 Cohen, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, Vol. 1, p. 198.

58 Cohen, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, Vol. 1, pp. 200–201.

59 Cohen, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, Vol. 1, p. 212.

For Cohen aesthetic theory comes down to this objectification. Whoever would speak in a disparaging fashion of a mere idealism here, underestimates the philosophical approach taken. Cohen speaks of that fact that in the process of the aesthetic objectification of the subject in nature, a “doubling” takes place.

We have always applied the formula: the nature of the human and the human of nature. There is great content that lies in this doubling. Human nature is initially the body of the human that in its first artistic inspiration is the figure. However, environing nature also belongs to human nature. Its organism belongs to this universal nature.⁶⁰

This reference is to be taken seriously. He here intends a specific repudiation of the naturalistic point of view. And yet he has a compelling anthropological point for aesthetics. Where the human is missing from our image of nature at first glance, there it becomes “looked at in addition”. It cannot be otherwise, for our talking about always implies the speaker who is part of the context that he brings to language. That is, according to Cohen, the continuity that all aesthetic consciousness must exhibit with regard to myth. “Where the human is missing in the landscape, there the stones talk for him”, for “there is no aesthetic nature without the immanence of the human”.⁶¹

Cohen leaves the coarse realist notions of the givenness of nature and the constructivist notion of it as a mere projection screen behind him. It makes little sense, in his opinion, to speak of nature as though the human must first put itself in relationship to it. The human of nature always already draws [*zieht*] the whole of nature into itself and this would not be an object of thinking, willing and feeling without the human as the “flashpoint”. This thought comes to its truth in the work of art for the work of art is “nature humanly centred”. That also means – and here he agrees with Berthold Auerbach⁶² – that the measure for the examination of works of art consists in substantiating the extent to which they make the human beings visible. They are only genuine works of art when a “genuine, full, limitless and infinite human love” lights up in them.⁶³ In this way Cohen bridges aesthetics, ethics and the philosophy of religion. It is only a matter here of different explications of the thought of correlation, which had been treated in its fundamentals in logic and developed in the

60 Cohen, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, Vol. 1, p. 214.

61 Cohen, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, Vol. 1, p. 216. He continues: “Thus is the formula: the human of nature to a compelling correlation also for the nature in the artwork.”

62 On this see also the relationship between Moritz Lazarus and the Berthold Auerbach, famous in his times.

63 Cohen, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, Vol. 1, p. 225.

other disciplines. The complete explication of correlation would be the notion of humanity which itself has a logical, ethical, aesthetic and religious-philosophical dimension.⁶⁴

It is important, in Cohen's conception, to strive for a complete explication of the notion of humanity, as Kant and Herder already intended in their different ways. However, this goal remains hidden in the horizon of infinite progression.⁶⁵ Cohen's analysis of humour has its motivation against the background of these considerations. He determines it to be a species of the beautiful and he subordinates it to the aforementioned duality of human nature and the human in nature. Humour too refers to the flashpoint in nature, the human being.⁶⁶

Humour is spoken of in the face of a tension found in the consideration of the human. It is a tension that results from pure self-feeling in creation and the affinity with nature.⁶⁷ The correlation between the human self and nature is processually mediated in the human nature. This means that it, as correlation, is neither reducible to thinking nor willing nor feeling. What is now at issue is bringing this correlation to expression in an appropriate way via the shaping [*Gestaltung*] of human nature in the work of art. Insofar as this is attained, the formation of "nature [implies ...] completion, peace; it is the insignia [*Feldzeichen*] of humour".⁶⁸

The discussion of humour in aesthetic theory is developed via the lead given by the human nature. This has an upper and a lower limit, namely, Gods and animals respectively. To Cohen as well, clashes at the borders of these regions are the great territory of humour. Sparks had already flown in the world of antiquity from this descent of the divine into the animal world "and from the affinity of the human with it in accordance with its animal nature". However, below this surface lurks a problem, namely the problem of the ugly, as well as a sen-

64 Cohen, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, Vol. 1, pp. 229ff. On this see Cassirer, *An Essay on Man*, p. 78: "If the term 'humanity' means anything at all it means that, in spite of all the differences and oppositions existing among its various forms, these are, nevertheless, all working toward a common end." Kluback, *The Idea of Humanity*, p. 99.

65 See Cassirer, "Naturalistische und humanistische Begründung der Kulturphilosophie" and Chapter 7, below.

66 Cohen, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, Vol. 1, p. 278: "That is nature in humour. It is human nature, which must always be for art in the horizon of nature. For this reason nature is absolutely not the correlate of knowledge but, as human nature, must be transposed into the duality of the preconditions. Human nature belongs just as much to morality as to knowledge."

67 Cohen, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, Vol. 1, p. 279: "The correlate of the self in pure feeling is the human being in its nature, it is reflected in the work of art. But of course the human being is and remains apart of nature, and more than this, a representative of nature."

68 Cohen, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, Vol. 1, p. 279.

sibility for the question concerning the humanity's unity despite its apparent differences. This sensibility was still lacking for the most part in the culture of the ancient world.⁶⁹

It is only under specific conditions, which Cohen does not make explicit in his aesthetic theory, that the consideration of human nature as such is the object of thought in the aforementioned correlation (namely, the human in nature, the nature of the human). However, then the problem of difference in humanity and above all the problem of the ugly in the human, now poses itself in anew. "When [...] the human ugliness is recognized as a moment of human nature and not simply one in the nature of the animal (which can arouse emotion and sympathy at best), when it recognized as an intrinsic characteristic of aesthetic consciousness, it is the object of humour."⁷⁰

This thought might be astonishing, but it is equally compelling. In Cohen's conception, a particular objectification of and distancing from universal nature is required so as to be able to get the human nature of the human in its "doubling". He wants to stick to the notion that it is human humour that expresses the achievement of distance that arises from the thought of correlation: "Humour says: this scarecrow of humanity, this is supposed to be a human being, an image of God!"⁷¹

In humour, the human being wins some distance from the nature in which it stands, and in humour it addresses the nature that it is. Humour is an aspect of the beauty of pure feeling and, thus regarded, a creation of the human spirit. It signals, among these creations, a basic power, an aesthetic power, in addition to the logical and ethical powers. It fulfils the task of actualizing the correlation between the human being and his or her fellows under the banner of humanity. His particular achievement consists in putting this realization to the test against the contrary of the beautiful, namely, the ugly. He accepts the fact of the ugly in the nature of the human⁷² and transforms it into an aspect of humanity, in which the aesthetically beautiful, the ethically good and the logically true are sublated.

"This fact must not be uninterpreted [*ungedeutet*], is not to remain reinterpreted [*umgedeutet*]." For what is at stake here is the "great office of theodicy to which alone pure feeling is due, that it justifies this repugnant fact in human nature. The ugly is ugly but humour beautifies it. It is not only that hu-

69 Cohen, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, Vol. 1, pp. 281 ff.

70 Cohen, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, Vol. 1, p. 282.

71 Cohen, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, Vol. 1, p. 283.

72 Cohen, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, Vol. 1, p. 287: "Humour, as an independent moment of the beautiful, originates preferably in the ugly, in contrast to the fact of the ugly in human nature."

mour can beautify it, but also that it must do so.”⁷³ The necessity appealed to here is not only an aesthetic and ethical necessity but also a logical necessity. Cohen stresses that the love of the human being for his or her fellows – the moment of movement in correlation, so to speak – would be untrue where it to flinch before the task of even embracing the ugly. Love alone ennoble this animal to the human.⁷⁴ Great works of art accomplish this task, they are an ennoblement of the human in the sense of humanity. The artist expresses his love for human nature in his or her work, as the example of Rembrandt shows. It is humour that constitutes the difference, but that also gives the claim to beauty to Rembrandt’s paintings.⁷⁵ The meaning of humour is not uproarious laughter and also not malicious glee or some other effect. The meaning of humour is inclusive the human in its whole extent. Thus it cannot disdain the ugly for it is “a feature in the human form and even in human face”.⁷⁶

Humour thus occupies a peculiar mid-position within human forms of expression. While Cohen understands beauty as a synthetic achievement *a priori*, that is, as a creation of pure feeling, humour is only an aspect of this creative feeling. However, it is at the same time directed towards human nature, as the example of ugliness shows. Nature in itself does not have a sense of humour. It is a pure feeling which enlivens nature, it is really only awakened to beauty. If that succeeds, then something radiates out from nature, which could only be brought to nature for creating. Without humour we would, as Cohen emphasizes, lack the insight into the creative significance of pure feeling. Humour “awakens beauty in nature”, gives “pure feeling direction for the creation of beautiful nature” and brings forth beautiful nature for “the maturing aesthetic directedness of consciousness for art”.⁷⁷

That, however, is only the end of a long process. Kant had already shown in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790) that the beautiful signals a representation of the harmony of the moments of consciousness, but this harmony is shattered in the confrontation with nature as an overpowering force and it can

73 Cohen, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, Vol. 1, p. 287.

74 Cohen, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, Vol. 1, p. 291.

75 Cohen, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, Vol. 1, pp. 294–295. Cohen is interested, among other things, in Rembrandt’s preference for Jewish characters, it cannot be explained by his living in the Jewish quarter of Amsterdam. “It is the soul which wistfully rests on the view of the ghetto in these eyes that forms his point of departure from which he realizes the entire arrangement and presentation of the body. There is no sentimentality here, that would shock the humour.” What is at issue is a completely harmonious accord of these figures with their souls. See Georg Simmel’s *Rembrandt – Ein Kunstphilosophischer Essay*.

76 Cohen, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, Vol. 1, p. 304.

77 Cohen, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, Vol. 1, pp. 343–344.

only be grasped anew in the long struggle in the form of a sublime human nature. This is what we have in Kant's theory of the sublime, in which no composure is to be attained in the face of external nature. However, for Cohen there is an indication that our endeavours, our vain struggle for an appropriate concept of nature, our spiritual work as a whole can find a conclusion – even if always only a provisional one. He refers to a notion of human nature that is not strange to the humane as Lazarus Geigner had already formulated it. “Peace brings bliss to consciousness which fades out in humour.” There is – in the face of the rest whether of all movement – no longer any resistance in nature for animation by pure feeling. Humour secures human magnitude in all the smallest parts of nature.⁷⁸

A Digression on Laughter

The one who laughs is open to the world.
(Helmuth Plessner)⁷⁹

Any digression on laughter must take into account the fact that this topic is inexhaustible. Nonetheless an overview can be provided of the range of linguistic and cultural-theoretical works on this in the late 19th and 20th century.⁸⁰ Even today, anthropological research on this issue is still largely at its initial stages, even though – or rather precisely because – the field has expanded to the disciplines of developmental psychology, evolutionary anthropology and behavioural biology.

Among the group of thinkers who are spoken of in this book, laughter is indeed a theme but it is dealt with under the generic term “humour”. Naturalistic reductionism with regard to cognitive capacities was still in its infancy. Even Moritz Lazarus' attempt to take the expressive phenomenon of laughter into account remains largely indebted to the tradition. For him, laughter is placed in the

⁷⁸ Cohen, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, Vol. 1, p. 346. And he adds: “That, however, is the merit we had to recognize in the moment of humour: it conquered nature for pure feeling and secures this possession for it while it had to abandon the sublime to morality.”

⁷⁹ Plessner, *Lachen und Weinen*, p. 154.

⁸⁰ See Höffding, *Humor als Lebensgefühl*. The danish scholar has authored a remarkable study on this topic, that on the one hand is a ‘psychology’ of humour in the Kierkegaardian sense and on the other, however, is also a good overview of the state of research at the time, for example the points presented in “Lachen und Humor” (Chapter 2) and “Humor und Philosophie” (Chapter 9).

domain of humour, that means, placed at the “contrast between what is and what should be, or what it wants to be”.⁸¹ Lazarus emphasizes that this contrast refers to a general determination of human nature, in which there is no given balance between the expression of the individual and the demands of the universal. In the field of ethics especially it is evident that in acting every one of us undermines the claim to our ethical reflexivity formulated by Kant. Yet, instead of falling into despair, Lazarus advises his readers to keep a sense of proportion and to recognize “the universality of contrast”. Only in this way can we succeed in practicing serenity by thus taking a humorous distance with regard to ourselves. “The real core flame of humour lights and glows, however, not there where, as in the previous, the one or the other side of the contrast prevails but where both are created in the soul of the reader as united themselves.”⁸²

Humour’s radiance [*Leuchten des Humors*] expresses itself in an affect that is to be described physiologically. Lazarus identifies laughing (and crying) as the form of humour. “Laughing and crying now rest on the same contrast, namely of the real and the deficient.” In our daily demeanour we run through “whole gamut of different laughing and crying”.⁸³ With the determination of the different contrasts between the real and the ideal, the factual and the desirable in human expressive behaviour, Lazarus provided a sketch of an anthropological conception of laughter. It is no more than a sketch but, as so often in Lazarus, it is amazingly accurate in its individual observations.

A further idea of Lazarus’ resounded in the early 20th century and still resonates today. This is the hypothesis that humour enables a critical comportment with regard to social conditions because it reveals its concealed truth. Laughter is its weapon.⁸⁴ The pugnacious linguistic critic Fritz Mauthner follows him in this regard. Mauthner maintains that there are different types of social critique and most of them remain blunt. Only “pure critique”, that it not itself partisan, can deploy a power that will destroy existing actuality in its complete irrationality – and this is one of the points of Mauthner’s anti-idealism. “Pure critique is fundamentally just an articulated laughter. Every laugh is critique, the best critique.”⁸⁵ However, while Cohen projects the image of a state of peace, Mauthner gives this image a resigned note. As will later be explained in detail, Mauthner

81 Lazarus, “Der Humor als psychologisches Phänomen”, p. 246.

82 Lazarus, “Der Humor als psychologisches Phänomen”, p. 249.

83 Lazarus, “Der Humor als psychologisches Phänomen”, p. 251.

84 Lazarus, “Der Humor als psychologisches Phänomen”, p. 284: “Laughter is the symptom, is the weapon of humour.”

85 Mauthner, *Lachen und Sprache*, p. 632; see also his *Wörterbuch der Philosophie – Neue Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, Vol. 1, pp. 514 – 523.

no longer trusts language as the basic form of human expression.⁸⁶ His mistrust is directed against the hope, formulated by Humboldt and going down to Steintal and Lazarus to Cohen, that human beings can be integrated by means of language in the actuality of life and that furthermore self-integration is possible as well. Mauthner declares this hope as a vain illusion and he calls for laughter as the expression of a “resignation or renunciation serene and silent as the heavens”.⁸⁷

These are strong words, behind which appears the ambition of carrying out a fundamental critique of culture. In this, however, Mauthner remains completely imprisoned in the mere negation of the tradition. His concept of a critique of language is a kind of a report on the vain quest for knowledge and a tragic description of the many attempts, why modern cultural humanity has become such as it appears to us today. It is a restless “back and forth between fierce desperation and the happiness of sedate illusion”.⁸⁸

In the above-mentioned works on the psychology and language of humour, laughter has been presented as a medium, a weapon for the purpose of distancing. In the context of a pervasive naturalization of the spirit, that the above-mentioned thinkers resist but whose success they could not hinder, the signs are gradually reversed. Laughter is no longer the expression of a spiritual capacity but it is itself the creative ground of humour. The anthropological turn in linguistic and cultural theory in the late 19th and early 20th century brings along with it the human’s becoming a constant and merciless object of analysis as regards the ambivalence of its emotional impulses (Freud), in its double aspectedness and tragic unity (Simmel) or its paradoxical interlacing of bodily and spiritual faculties (Plessner).

With regard to the intensification of this debate, the sociologist Peter Berger has given a precise reference for the further investigation of laughter. It is an apparent paradox, in his view, that the same physiological process that involuntarily follows from an external stimulus can also be triggered though a complex, culturally mediated states of affairs (a joke). Here we have two senses of the elementary in view: an elementary stimulus of the organic world and the elementary expression of the cultural world meet in the process of laughter. Who would want to deny that the one stimulus distinguishes we humans as natural organisms and the other as cultural beings. “*Homo ridens* is astounding because in

86 See Chapter 6 below.

87 Mauthner, *Lachen und Sprache*, p. 634: “The lowest form of knowledge is in language, the highest in laughter; the last is in the critique of language, in resignation or renunciation serene and silent as the heavens.”

88 Mauthner, *Lachen und Sprache*, p. 641.

him that which has the strongest animal character in humans and that which is mostly distant from the animal, come into contact."⁸⁹

From here let us just take it as is obvious that we can, with good conscience, leave the consideration of whether animals laugh to the researchers into nature and turn to the phenomenal domain of human laughter. On this score, Berger poses the following questions: Why do human beings laugh at themselves, at others and at the things they meet in their world? What is the elementary moment of human laughter? Henri Bergson, Helmuth Plessner, Joachim Ritter and Alfred Schütz have already provided notable answers to these questions. Plessner stands out from this group because he carried out in-depth studies of the phenomenon of laughter, taking into account the limits of physiology, psychology, sociology and philosophy. Through this work Plessner saw something remarkable. Plessner observes that laughter is, as it were, a bodily function *as well as* a relation to the world and that both come together in the phenomenon of expression. This dual aspect of the expression of laughter indicates that the human being itself is a "dual and intermediate being".⁹⁰

As a bodily function, laughter is as elementary as blushing, coughing and sneezing. It thus expresses itself differently, namely it is not symbolically pronounced, as emotional expressive movements such as anger and joy. We are compulsively attacked by laughter; but as opposed to blushing, laughter does not react to a certain situation but addresses the situation. Hence laughter is signalled as more than a bodily function: "Not my body, but I laugh [...] 'at something'."⁹¹ In laughter I relate to the world. On the one hand, an attack of laughter, of genuine, non-feigned laughter, marks a loss of control (just like crying). As a human person I lose control, my usual and ingrained manner of relating is not effective, thus "the body, as it were, the answer for it".⁹² Laughter shows how precarious the everyday balance is, the balance that a human being must bring about between his or her dual role of being a body (being incarnate [*Leib*]) and having a body (the bearer of functions).⁹³

Something elementary shows itself in these exceptional situations, for which there is no temporal beginning, that is, no prior, pre-human equivalent. What is meant here is the difference between being a body and having a body, which is

⁸⁹ Berger, *Erlösendes Lachen*, p. 54.

⁹⁰ Plessner, *Lachen und Weinen*, p. 17.

⁹¹ Plessner, *Lachen und Weinen*, p. 32.

⁹² Plessner, *Lachen und Weinen*, p. 43. See the proximity of the argumentation to Kant's theory of the sublime.

⁹³ See considerations on this complex of problems in Fuchs, *Leib und Lebenswelt – Neue philosophisch-psychiatrische Essays*.

only a problem for us humans. This unity in instinctive relations bound to the environmental is lacking for us, but we come to realize a balance in our everyday lives that usually sustains us. The elementary difference between my being a body and my control of my body shows itself in crisis situations, when the norms and conventions of our everyday life do not hold and where surprising things occur (such as in an earthquake, for example). We see in one fell swoop, as John Dewey already emphasized in his great study *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), that their unity is not a given but is acquired.⁹⁴ Because of this, laughter signals a total relation of the I as being also something other than a social function. It is an elementary kind of self-relating in the face of the collapse of some capacity that is based on our bodily practice and the mastery of our body and which thus come under the rubric of a “natural artificiality” in the way we enact our lives.⁹⁵

Plessner calls the distance to this difference, that is not a third party distance, “eccentric positionality”. Here eccentric means the possibility of losing balance, losing control, falling out of the role *and* catching it again. Max Scheler speaks here of “world-openness [*Weltoffenheit*]” – that is, the human being must at every moment fear that the normal, customary and familiar can suddenly become their opposite. It also means that our human world as a whole does not have the character of a fixed and stable [*feststehenden*] environment.⁹⁶ This is something that is so elementary for us humans that it would be a defining characteristic of us, if it implied any limitations. This is, however, simply not the case and for this reason our human environmental relations appear to be so elementarily different to those of other living beings that comparison seems inappropriate.

Plessner stresses that the situation of humans as body within a body does not provide them with clear behaviours. There are situations to which the human being cannot find any direct answer. In such a way, an unanswerable position in which danger is absent excites laughter (or crying). Our answer to this is a forfeit and a kind of distancing, an acknowledgement and exit from the situation; in short: a laughter that is inevitable. In this respect the description of laughter is largely independent of an analysis of motivation. Whether it is tickling or the recounting of a joke – human beings laugh when they are in a state of uncertainty for which they are “unprepared” by conventional means.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ See Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct – An Introduction to Social Psychology*.

⁹⁵ See Plessner, *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*. See also Hartung, *Das Maß des Menschen*, pp. 115–126.

⁹⁶ See Hartung, *Philosophische Anthropologie*, pp. 44–69.

⁹⁷ Plessner, *Lachen und Weinen*, p. 105.

With the uncovering of situations that “are no longer clear” and to which the human being must give an answer that makes sense, we enter the domain of the “comic”.⁹⁸ The comic manifests the elementary moment of laughter but it also expresses itself across an infinite variety of socio-cultural contexts. Human beings everywhere laugh at themselves and their world but the objects of this and the situations vary. There is no better introduction to this topic than Henri Bergson’s essay *Le Rire* [*Laughter*], published in German translation from 1921. What Plessner brought out as the body’s failure to adapt to a new situation, Bergson, working on a socio-cultural level, calls the conflict between a mechanically rigid way of relating to a dynamically changing world. The sparks of comedy fly ever anew from the limit situation in which that someone holds on to their habits, their views or their life-style. Cervantes *Don Quichote* is the prototype of the person distracted and absent from the everyday, who sees things differently and different things and who expresses an attitude that withdraws him from his environment.⁹⁹

It depends, for Bergson, on a description of the conflict between the individual and the institution [and] above all on the attitude that the individual takes up. For him what is at stake is whether the individual takes on this struggle or whether it ruins him. Plessner, however, takes a step back and sees the comic moment in the ‘counter-sensical’ [*Gegensinnigkeit*] of a fabricated unity to be brought about between individual behaviour and norm. All disproportionate-ness: long detours, fierce endeavours that lead back to the starting point, tensions that melt into nothing, gestures and gesticulations, that do not hide their hollowness – have an effect that is overwhelmingly comic, for it evinces unity as “counter-sensical [*Gegensinnigkeit*]”.¹⁰⁰

98 See Plessner, *Lachen und Weinen*, pp. 106ff.

99 Bergson, “Laughter”, p. 69: “How profound is the comic element in the over-romantic [...] [T]hese whimsical wild enthusiasts, these madmen who are yet so strangely reasonable, excite us to laughter by playing on the same chords within ourselves, by setting in motion the same inner mechanism, as does the victim of a practical joke or the passer-by who slips down in a street. They, too, are runners who fall and simple souls who are being hoaxed – runners after the ideal who stumble over realities, child-like dreamers for whom life delights to lie in wait. But, above all, they are past masters in absentmindedness, with this superiority over their fellows that their absentmindedness is systematic and organized around one central idea, and that their mishaps are also quite coherent, thanks to the inexorable logic which reality applies to the correction of dreams, so that they kindle in those around them, by a series of cumulative effects, a hilarity capable of unlimited expansion.”

100 Plessner, *Lachen und Weinen*, p. 112. See Hans Robert Jaufß’ precise contextual analysis in *Ästhetische Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik*.

For us, the counter-sensical lies in the ambivalence of appearances to our conception. In laughter we also bridge this gap between the expected and the actual. In all kinds of laughter, from physical stimulus in tickling up to culturally influenced triggers in comic situations and in jokes, we encounter the elementary conflict of human beings, to both be in a situation and to stand out from it. “The one who laughs is open to the world.”¹⁰¹ Here Plessner comes close to Lazarus’ and Cohen’s conceptions of humour. Yet, feeling pressured by research into nature and evolutionary biology in particular, he goes a step further and points out that the opening of the world is only to be understood in the horizon of an anthropological difference and an ambivalence of forces. If it were otherwise, we would not be able to see what everyday situation or existential despair is being overcome in the expressive phenomenon of laughter.

Release from a rigid environment in laughter is the condition of freedom. What is at stake is thus not only the question of what I free myself from (constraint, narrowness of surrounding and so on) but also the question of why I free myself at all. We humans not only release ourselves from our circumstances in laughter but we also seek to arrive at new bonds – otherwise our laughter sticks in our throat. The comic often has the aspect of establishing a community in the aggressive exclusion of an individual ethnic group or in subtler form. The fact that we can succeed or fail in finding the balance between release and bondage is one of the strongest indications for the ambivalent human situation described by Plessner, that seeks to integrate a variety of situations in which elementary differences in wholly different socio-cultural contexts can break out.

Thus regarded, laughter is the most striking pieces of evidence (besides crying) for the contention that the physiological, evolutionary and behavioural biological explanatory model is inadequate. The uniquely human manner of existing, of which Hans Robert Jauß also speaks, is on Plessner’s view only sufficiently described with the concept of the ‘counter-sense’ of “being a body” / “having a body” and the complex of behavioural pattern that results from this duality.¹⁰² It is only from the counter-sense of the elementary situation of the human being that we can laugh at ourselves, our fellows and the world-created “demands” [*Ansinen*] of sociality and the cultural. The “liberation from a burden, constriction, oppression” precedes the liberation leading to a new form of coexistence.¹⁰³

101 Plessner, *Lachen und Weinen*, p. 154.

102 See Jauß, *Ästhetische Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik*, p. 216.

103 See, in contrast to Plessner’s beginning with “counter-sense” as the elementary structure of the human manner of existence, the approach of Michel Tomasello and his research group that starts with “shared and collective intentionality” and “willingness to cooperate”. See the funda-

An anthropological theory of laughter in Plessner's sense sticks to the notion that human laughter, in its exclusivity, is a uniquely human attempt to answer a life situation that is unanswerable in its immediacy. This certainly includes the ambivalence and ambiguity of those very attempts to respond. Thus an attack of laughter can lead to a confirmation or likewise an abandonment of a situation at hand. Both variants have been long discussed in literature and in the sciences. Does laughter primarily have an affirmative power that confirms the prevailing social order or does it have a subversive power that circumvents this order? Current debates in behavioural biology and in evolutionary psychology often consider laughter as a bodily function in a social context and only emphasize its affirmative effect.¹⁰⁴

This, however, is not so in theology and philosophy where the abysmal ambivalence of human laughter has been repeatedly established. There were two theoretical approaches in the previous century that look at laughter from a cultural-theoretical perspective. On one hand we find Joachim Ritter's conception that Odo Marquard had brought into the working group *Poetics and Hermeneutics* [*Poetik und Hermeneutik*].¹⁰⁵ Laughter is considered by Ritter as the expression of the human being's constitutive achievement, for it also manages to integrate the absurd and the inane into its living reality.

The power of the comic to resolve [...] can only really originate where the different and counter-sensical norms or levels of existence are not of equal importance and in serious conflict but rather where they take an unpredictable turn that brings the nullity hitherto excluded by normative seriousness into play.¹⁰⁶

The subversive impulse of Ritter's treatise *On Laughter* [*Über das Lachen*], which first appeared in the *Papers for German Philosophy* [*Blätter für Deutsche Philosophie*], shows itself in the demand that on the one hand laughter affirms the existing social order but on the other hand, however, also claims the marginalized as an integral part of this order itself. The order thereby loses its holy seriousness and opens itself to the other. For Ritter too the one who laughs is open to the world but it is also his view that laughter's merit lies in its releasing and liberating power. However, in this theoretical approach an affirmative feature can also

mental text on this, Tomasello and Rakoczy, "Was macht menschliche Erkenntnis einzigartig? Von individueller über geteilte zu kollektiver Intentionalität".

104 See van Hooff and Preuschoft, "Laughter and Smiling: The Intertwining of Nature and Culture".

105 See Marquard, "Exile der Heiterkeit".

106 See Jauß, *Ästhetische Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik*, p. 217.

be found that characterizes the right of Hegelianism as a whole. The actual, as well as the at-first-sight “nonsensical” actual, is of course rational. In laughter we only bridge the gap between the first impression of nonsense and the later knowledge of the reason immanent to all actuality.¹⁰⁷

The power of ironical laughter ultimately fizzles out in the subsequent knowledge that actuality is to us as it appears. The power of laughter to release does not lead to contradiction and also not to redemption from the limitations of the actual. Alfred Schütz had shown in his study *On Multiple Realities* (1962) where the border of this analysis lies, from where the other approach in the theory of laughter is to be addressed. According to Schütz, laughter breaks out where different levels of sense of our social and cultural world are in conflict – with the result that our everyday assurance of how things are is shockingly broken.¹⁰⁸ The reaction to such an intrusion into reality is a transcending of the current situation but with a dual possibility. Either we chose to return and stabilize the everyday situation – a selective laughing over of anxiety and need in Ritter’s sense – or we opt for a transformation of the everyday. The latter option means a movement of opening up, of undercutting the existing order, a subversive relation that is fitting for a creature open to the world and it is also in an emphatic sense first constituted in opposition to the existing order. The Hegelianism of Ritter’s school, with its praise of usual practices, had overlooked or not wanted to look at this option.

Peter Berger takes up the ideas of his teacher Alfred Schütz anew and seeks to understand the comical – as comparatively the holy – “as a signal of transcendence”.¹⁰⁹ Human laughter is more than a reaction to an external or internal stimulus, it is more than a social function, it is rather the expression of the profound ambivalence of human nature, what we understand in Plessner’s sense as the conflict between the natural and artificial levels of existence or, with Sigmund Freud, as one of the expressive phenomena of the ambivalences of emotional excitation inwardly ruling in our everyday life. Structurally speaking, it is especially important that this ambivalence and ambiguity brings out the irrevocable conflict of the bodily and spiritual levels of our existence. It is also clear,

107 Ritter, “Über das Lachen”, pp. 77–78: “What characterises triviality as such, what establishes the oppositional as such, excluding them as that which is exceptional, inessential, nonsensical, incomprehensible and so on is always the positive order itself, which existence grants unto itself. [...] What is played out and grasped in laughter is this secret belonging of the inessential/the trivial to existence [...] thus that it becomes visible and audible within the very order that excludes it.”

108 See Schütz, “On Multiple Realities”.

109 See Berger, *Erlösendes Lachen*.

then, that the liberating and transcending power of laughter itself cannot be exhausted in the confirmation of the existing orders of life.

There is an evident difference between a psychological and a religious-philosophical theory on the one hand and on an analysis of laughter in Plessner's sense on the other. The unifying moment, however, is not obvious. It is to be found exactly where the ambivalence of the human form of life is brought out in the respective theories and the real task of the human being is seen in the successful interweaving of the material and the ideal or of the bodily and the spiritual side. An important distinction thereby shows itself whose significance is scarcely to be overestimated. Where Lazarus and Cohen project the concept of the peace of humour as the successful pacification of the human soul in aesthetic and religious experience, in Plessner the self-transcending of the human being leads to ever further conflicts and at best to occasional relief. Plessner no longer holds to the hope of a future liberation of the self from its opposite, the world, nor does he see the possibility of a successful integration of the self into the world.¹¹⁰ What remains is a structural conflict that pervades the human form of life and leads to an irrevocable existential risk. That is the price of a theory of the human that is strictly immanent to the world.

4.4 Messianism and the Ideal of Peace in Cohen

Cohen's comments on laughter, that are scattered throughout his *Aesthetics of Pure Feeling* [*Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*], underscore these ideas. His considerations on the human-animal distinction in the light of an analysis of aesthetic consciousness are astounding – and have not previously been taken into account in the secondary literature on Cohen.

The human being wants to be a son of God – one is not to be angered at this; nor to cry; that is, to laugh. Laughter is the most proper symptom of aesthetic consciousness. The animal can cry, but not laugh. Laughter, the specific symptom of aesthetic consciousness, distinguishes human and animal.¹¹¹

Cohen distinguishes between laughter as the affective side of human behaviour on one hand and smiling as the spiritual side of behaviour on the other. In his view, a smile is not a “reflexive movement”, it is also not an “expressive

¹¹⁰ See, however, Ernst Cassirer's position which will be presented in Chapter 7.

¹¹¹ Cohen, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, Vol. 1, p. 283. And he adds on p. 286: “Laughter everywhere should be a distinguishing feature of the human from the animal. There may be evanescent exceptions to this. The smile, however, is certainly uniquely human.”

movement” per se. A smile is an expression of human freedom that also exceeds the limits of knowledge and morality. In humour, whose appropriate expression is the smile alone, a movement over the borderlines of finitude is shown, it “reveals a freedom of the soul which is not triumphant over all knowledge and all morality, that lies far from it, but yet it is still sublime to them”.¹¹² The reach of humour is far, it is the subversive power that enables every human being to win distance from the orders of the actual – whether in Jerusalem in the time of the prophets or in the Berlin of the early 20th century. Cohen’s last word on this topic, his impressive speech on the “peace of humour” is plea for a human reason that does not hold itself to reflecting on its own finitude and accordingly, the limits of this world and, in its failure to provide an appropriate expression for the infinite, is not however resigned but opens itself for the future. This self-transcendence enables a presentiment of the peace of God.

We see the connection between Cohen’s aesthetic theory and philosophy of religion exactly at the point where the idea of peace is thought through together with the concept of humour. In the correlation between God and the human, the relatedness to each other of “eternal work” and unfinished deed shows itself. What we humans accomplish is never concluded, all the conclusion of our deeds is relative, however eternal work also means processuality. To recognize this is bound up with the insight into the correlation between God and human as the “fundamental equation of religion” or the “norm of monotheism”.¹¹³ Without this fundamental relation this context would not be thinkable.

“All humour stems from the relativity of the conclusion of the eternal work whose symbol is peace.”¹¹⁴ In opposition to Heraclitus and his epigones in modernity, Cohen does not see the father of all things in war. Rather for him peace is the primordial force [*Urkraft*] of human interaction. To say that “God is peace” means to put all everything that happens under the principle of aim and purpose. Cohen speaks of a teleology implanted in the soul of the human being. Peace is the ideal of the messianic human being for only in peace is the salvation of human beings complete.¹¹⁵

In the great book on the *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism* [*Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*] Cohen designates peace as the unifying power of human consciousness. Peace of mind is only to be had

112 Cohen, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, Vol. 1, p. 287.

113 See Cohen, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, p. 132.

114 Cohen, *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*, Vol. 1, p. 348.

115 Cohen, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, p. 517. On the Aristotelian background see Hartung, “Vom Telos der Seele. Wilhelm Diltheys Grundlinien der pädagogischen Wissenschaft”.

through knowledge. It is not faith without knowledge that finds true peace of mind; its ground is rather found in reason. This ground can only be realized when the hate in the hearts of human beings is “uprooted”. This occurs through the hope for the peace of humanity as the purpose of the human – it is “the Messiah” of humanity.¹¹⁶ The idea of peace was and always will form the healing power of the prophetic. Its aesthetic power first breaks through in the prophets and is then found anew in the great passages of the later Jewish literature of the West. It is the “peace of humour”. Hardly anywhere else is “the method of idealistic thinking” shown in the concise sense that Alexander Altmann sees as at work in the correlation of the concept of origin and creation in Cohen.¹¹⁷

116 Cohen, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, p. 529. And he adds on p. 531: “All sense, all value of life lies in peace. It is the unity of all vital forces, their balance and the settlement of all their contradictions. Peace is the crown of life.”

117 See Altmann, “Hermann Cohens Begriff der Korrelation”, pp. 315–316.

5 On Tact as Form of Sociability

For tact, we now know, had its precise historical hour.
(Theodor W. Adorno)¹

In his *Minima Moralia*, Adorno had, according to the subtitle of his book, outlined “Reflections on a Damaged Life”. These also include a miniature on the “dialectic of tact”.² Adorno vividly describes how the motif of tact was projected as “the saving accommodation between alienated human beings” in modernity and had fulfilled this task at a precise historical hour. As can be read in Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister*, at the dawn of modernity the individual rids itself of the constraints of the Ancien Rêgime and sets out in search of a new form of coexistence in which a balance between duty and freedom should be possible. What Adorno pointedly calls the “seemingly paradoxical interchange between absolutism and liberality”, appears otherwise to the perspective of Goethe and the generations that followed him. To speak, as Adorno does, of an insurmountable paradox only makes sense in retrospect. Although the 19th century articulates the tension between tradition and new social mores, it also seeks the reconciliation of these opposites. Already in his genealogy of the damaging of socio-cultural and spiritual forms, Adorno regards this approach with suspicion. “[T]he exercise of tact was as paradoxical as its historical location. It demanded the reconciliation – actually impossible – between the unauthorized claims of convention and the unruly ones of the individual.”³

In the following pages we will look back and venture the supposition (retrospectively quite improbable, none the least due to its exacerbation by Adorno) that the thinking of a successful balance between general and individual forces, between society and the individual, is not just a theoretical naivety. The preceding observations on linguistic and cultural theory support this idea. With Georg Simmel’s exposition of tact as a form of sociability a further dimension will be added to these considerations.

1 See Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, “Erster Teil. Zur Dialektik des Takts”, pp. 36–39. English translation from Adorno, *Minima Moralia* (trans. E.F.N. Jephcott), “On the Dialectic of Tact”, pp. 35.

2 See Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, “Zur Dialektik des Takts”, p. 37, English translation from *Minima Moralia* (trans. E.F.N. Jephcott), “On the Dialectic of Tact”, pp. 35–37.

3 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, “Zur Dialektik des Takts”, p. 37, English translation from *Minima Moralia* (trans. E.F.N. Jephcott), “On the Dialectic of Tact”, p. 36.

What does our speaking of tact mean? First, contact between sense and sensibility in tactile sense [*Tastsinn*], the inner feeling for proportion, but also the external measure of time (in hourly intervals), of language (in verse), of song and music (in rhythm).⁴ Tact always appears as a wholly inconspicuous element, it designates the successful encounter, appropriate contact, the observance of the orders of space, time, language and custom, the tailor-made movement and the fitting expression. Tact is also phenomenally related to the ethical phenomenon of “conscience” – we experience it in the moment of tactlessness (as in unscrupulousness) and infer tact as a rule in social coexistence.

5.1 A Genealogy of Tact in Kant and Herbart

A precise observer of social phenomena in the 19th century, Moritz Lazarus, knew from his own experience what occurred with the *culture of difference*. He had seen that social phenomena reveal themselves in the first instance in their differing from regularities and normalities. Thus it is a certain paradox that the concept of tact too primarily receives “its determinacy [...] through a repulsive power in negative judgement. In the attempt to orient themselves, the educated human being discovers a lot faster what tact is not rather than what it actually is.”⁵ Whoever speaks about tact has for the most part first-hand experience of tactlessness.

The demand that social actors bring their actions in specific situations into accord with a principled morality arises in all areas of the social world. The subsumption of individual case under the general rule is never unambiguous and always leaves some leeway. While the leeway of just, honourable, decent behaviour for the individual was rather circumscribed up to the collapse of a feudal society, after 1789, as Georg Simmel has shown, in the democratic era, the peculiar and strangely ambivalent play of equality and difference determine the form of behaviour known as social tact.

Even Kant, in his caustics of practical reason, had failed to provide a satisfactory solution (because his solution remains all too rigid and inflexible) to the problem of moral behaviour, more precisely, to the problem of a subsumption of the individual case under a general moral law. In his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798) Kant actually exacerbates the situation [*Problemlage*]. He there underlines the fact that there are sharp and clear as well as vague and confused representations in human consciousness, representations that have to

⁴ See Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, Vol. 11, 1st Section, Part I, pp. 92–93.

⁵ Lazarus: “Der Tact”, p. 10, note.

be differentiated in epistemological intent. He also acknowledges that confused and vague representations are also directive of action. Here we often see a depth of soul [*Gemüt*], a genius at work and trust in the soundness of a judgment that is grounded in the obscurity of the soul.⁶

With the notion of “logical tact” Kant appeals to a faculty that in a case of insecurity, when it is undecidable where rules and principles are applicable in an individual case, allows us “to take a chance on the outburst from the determining grounds of the masses of judgment that lie in the obscurity of the mind”.⁷ Thus logical tact correlates to a failure of “logical punctuality” in the subsumption of an individual case and a general rule, as Kant claims in his *Lectures on Logic*. To put it simply, for Kant tact has a logical compensatory function and is hence to be justified with regard to logic. The failure of a secure application of principles and rules is but only an interruption in logical calculation. Although we leave it to something’s “occurring” to us in the particular situation at hand, we fundamentally adhere to logical calculation in the successful mediation of individual case and general principle. In application that means that in the absence of clear principles we prove our judgments “continually through experiment and success”.⁸ Logic leads to anthropology.

In the section entitled *On the Distribution of Language among several Nations* [*Von der Verteilung der Sprache unter mehrere Nationen*] in his *On the Diversity of Human Linguistic Structure* [*Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues*], Wilhelm von Humboldt gives a variation on Kant’s anthropological determination.⁹ Humboldt regards comparative linguistic research as finding itself in a situation of “embarrassment” [Verlegenheit] due to the abundance of empirical data, because, in the analysis of linguistic structure, it is not capable of separating with absolute certainty, purely and with genuine accuracy, the fixed from the fleeting, or to put it more precisely, the truly conditional in the individuality of languages from the accidental and the indifferent.¹⁰ The relinquishment of high-

6 See for the conceptual-historical background the article “Takt” in the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. J. Ritter, Vol. 10, pp. 882–886.

7 Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, First Book, § 6.. English translation from Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, First Book, § 6, 140.

8 Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, First Book, § 6, 140. (7) I do not want to read “between the lines here” as Jürgen-Eckhardt Pleines suggests doing in his article “Die logische Funktion des Takts im Anschluß an das Kantische System der Philosophie betrachtet”. I rather want to limit myself to depicting Kant as, at best, an initiator of this debate.

9 See Humboldt, *Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluß auf die geistige Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts*.

10 Humboldt: *Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluß auf die geistige Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts*, p. 220.

est accuracy in the description demands, in positive terms, a method of transcription of the object, that means a procedure that “avails itself of tact, that is acquired through careful comparison of different linguistic forms and is unmistakable to the extent that it is established on a deep and creative study of the details”.¹¹

For Humboldt tact proves itself in the consideration of the individual moments. The characteristic features of languages can only be transcribed with reference to a general principle. An understanding of the human linguistic community must go through the analysis of the individual moments of speaking and of languages, without allowing itself to be carried away by the contingency of individuals and without prematurely laying down any generality.¹²

This can be understood as the consistent continuation of Kantian *Anthropology*. If the consideration of the human is in fact submerged in the grey light of empiricism, the human individual is left behind, the individual who attempts tries to indicate something general in experience, in learning [*Erleben, Erfahren*], in situated judgments. Johann Friedrich Herbart had discussed these ideas in his *A Textbook of Psychology* [*Lehrbuch der Psychologie*].¹³ Herbartian pedagogy is to be understood via psychology and practical philosophy (and their anthropological implications¹⁴).¹⁵

In his *First Lecture on Pedagogy* [*Erste Vorlesung über Pädagogik*] (1802) Herbart distinguishes pedagogy as science from the art of upbringing. In his investigation he turns to science, in which he distinguishes between theory and practice. In practice we gain experience but without an *a priori* principle we cannot, in the domain of experience, speak of approaching the completeness of empirical data. To guarantee the course to completeness, philosophy insists on an *a priori* moment in pedagogical praxis. Thus for Herbart pedagogy as science is directed by principles. In every attempt to apply a theory to praxis it is shown that a simple transfer model cannot be intended. A moment of tact is thus crucial in the tension between a theory of education and educative praxis.¹⁶

11 Humboldt: *Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluß auf die geistige Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts*, p. 221.

12 See Chapter 1, above, on Humboldt's research into language and its critical assessment.

13 See Johann Friedrich Herbart, *Lehrbuch der Psychologie*, Part III, Section 2, pp. 132–203.

14 For a critique of Herbartian psychology and its implications, see Hartung, “Von einer Misshandlung des Zweckbegriffs. F.A. Trendelenburgs Kritik der praktischen Philosophie Herbarts”.

15 See Shoko Suzuki. “Takt als Medium. Überlegungen zum Taktbegriff von J.F. Herbart” (and the literature mentioned there).

16 Herbart, “Erste Vorlesung über Pädagogik”, p. 440.

As “a superhuman being [would] be required” for the perfect application of scientific tenets in praxis, “a way of acting” is required in human beings who are under pressure to decide in each individual situation “which firstly depends on their feelings and only distantly on their convictions”.¹⁷ Here humans give vent to their inner movements, act according to the obscure specifications of their state of mind and not from the clear result of a thinking process. The echo of the Kantian formulation is obvious. However, Herbart takes psychology seriously. For him, it is no longer part of logic. Using the example of tact as a psychological phenomenon, what Kant had evinced in his theory of judgment, especially in the development of his theory of the sublime, is shown namely, that in practice only a pre-logical principle of judgment is possible in the face of the unmanageable and unclear criteria of judgment formation. Or, in Herbart’s words, that tact inevitably enters those the places left empty by theory and thus becomes “the immediate Regent of practice”.¹⁸

How is tact formed in human beings? According to Herbart this happens in practice, through the influences from the domain of experience on our feelings which are themselves in turn dependent on our mood [*Gestimmtheit*]. The responsibility of human beings results from this, that of preparing their head and heart through consideration, reflection and inquiry for the right reception, understanding, sense for each of the situationally variable phenomena in social life. This depends on being equipped with general principles which do not make a mockery of experience. More precisely, it depends on competence in separating the significant from the indifferent. In practicalities that means finding a balance between freedom and duty. The goal is “self-mastery”.¹⁹

In his *Aphorisms on Pedagogy* [*Aphorismen zur Pädagogik*] Herbart clarifies these considerations.²⁰ The capacity for tact is coupled with the “idea of versatility”.²¹ What is at stake are rules of versatility in activity and receptivity at the service of moral reason. In a constantly changing world that is enriched with experiences, it is urgently necessary not to just strictly insist on compliance with rules and the implementation of clear principles. Rather it is essential to adapt behaviour to the changing situational conditions of judgment formation. Versatility means competence in assessing the respective social situation, balance between fidelity to principles and the needs of the situation. What is set

17 Herbart, “Erste Vorlesung über Pädagogik”, p. 440.

18 Herbart, “Erste Vorlesung über Pädagogik”, p. 441.

19 See Herbart, *Lehrbuch der Psychologie*, Part III, Section 2, Chapter 5, “Von der Selbstbeherrschung”, pp. 181–193.

20 Herbart, “Aphorismen zur Pädagogik”.

21 Herbart, “Aphorismen zur Pädagogik”, p. 398.

as a task for humanity as a whole in modernity is especially demanded of the educator, that is, demanded as “pedagogical tact” in the teaching situation.²²

5.2 Moritz Lazarus on the Counter-sense of Tact

Moritz Lazarus had dedicated an entire chapter to the topic of “tact” in his three-volume study *The Life of the Soul in Monographs on its Phenomena and Laws [Das Leben der Seele in Monographien über seine Erscheinungen und Gesetze]* (Vol. 3. Second Edition: Berlin 1882).²³ This is the first separate study on our subject. Lazarus calls his treatise a psychological investigation and it aims at the knowledge of tact as an inner fact [inneren Tatsache]. Inner facts are formed by the law of apperception in the sense of an acquisition of new masses of representation [Vorstellungsmassen] and their association with representations that have already been processed. As inner facts they are entirely “wavering and vacillating” and only obtain a stable form through the articulated word.²⁴ This pattern occurs on the individual-historical and the species-historical level. In a developed culture and historical era, an educated human being already receives, with the vocabulary formed, a clear understanding of instructive psychological facts that are present in the public spirit of the people. Nevertheless, as Lazarus emphasizes, it is almost impossible to set out the precise origination and content of these views but only to describe the acquisition and processing procedure, i.e., to describe apperception.²⁵

In fact, in most cases of application the object – be it a word, an image etc – receives a great variety of determinations, of which only a few aspects are actively applied on each specific occasion. Thus even if each individual side of the matter for every individual occasion is present in consciousness, it still remains a particular and at times not easy enterprise to gather the scattered members of the whole and to call them to mind. This however will chiefly be the case when the different sides of the phenomenon belong to wholly different spheres of inner life.²⁶

The above-named difficulty is especially evident in our topic, for “tact is such a phenomenon” i.e., one which belongs to different spheres of inner life.

²² See Herbart, “Aphorismen zur Pädagogik”, pp. 409–410.

²³ See Lazarus, “Der Tact”. Compare the editor Klaus Christian Köhnke’s “Introduction” to Moritz Lazarus, *Grundzüge der Völkerpsychologie und Kulturwissenschaft*, pp. IX–XLII.

²⁴ Lazarus, “Der Tact”, p. 6.

²⁵ See Chapter 3 above.

²⁶ Lazarus, “Der Tact”, p. 7.

Lazarus questions what the unified whole of this concept is, given that occurs in diverse regions of life as pedagogical, sociable, musical tact, as well as a feeling for language and sense of justice. We do have an insight into the “essence of tact” in use but the concept has many meanings. Because of the constitution of the psychic content as well as the fullness of its domain, it refers to “a rich condensation [*Verdichtung*] from largely unconscious and latent elements of thinking” because of the composition of the psychical content and because of the abundance of that which falls under its domain.²⁷

The same holds for tact as for every psychical fact. First the floating elements of inner intuition crystallize themselves in apperception through the word in representation. This begins a process of appropriating and processing simple concepts. The education of the single individual as well as of entire cultures rests on the results of this process.²⁸ In a fragment of text from 1862 Lazarus had set out the formula to which the universality in this process can be brought: he calls it the condensation of thinking in history. The process of apperception always begins with scarcely heeded discoveries, then within the hard work of recognition [*Erkenntnisarbeit*] taken up with this arises a fundament of cultural self-understanding for subsequent generations. The aim of the spirit’s activity in one epoch is the point of departure for the considerations of later human beings. Elementary forms of thinking as well as intuitions become “condensed” into concepts in which a long extended past forms a closed presence.

Not all events enter into this process of condensation. Subjective and objective “means” decide the success and failure of a given appropriation: moods, feelings and interests on one hand, forms of knowledge and language on the other. Specifically, language allows the infinite sum of anticipatory thoughts to feed into the “unspeakably rich treasure of spiritual content”²⁹ into the process of tradition. The heritage of the entire past is handed down to new human beings by means of language. However, language is not only a means of communication but also of education [*Bildungsmittel*]; the forms of language of the individual mind is able to heed alien thoughts; in like manner to think and understand them – and in this way facilitate the formation [*Bildung*] of cultural identity.³⁰

This process of the condensation of thought, as the art of combining the manifold and the increased easing of the difficult alone rests the view that the cultural human being would

²⁷ Lazarus, “Der Tact”, pp. 9–10.

²⁸ Lazarus, “Verdichtung des Denkens in der Geschichte. Ein Fragment”, p. 29.

²⁹ Lazarus, “Der Tact”, p. 31.

³⁰ See Chapters 1 and 3 above where these fundamental ideas of Steinthal and Lazarus are developed.

not gradually become completely overwhelmed on all sides by the accumulating *en masse* of the matter of knowledge.³¹

Thus regarded, the formation [*Ausbildung*] of cultural identity is linked to the reduction of complexity; apperception is a procedure of selection from the “enormous amount of representations” that press in upon us at every moment of time.

A more accurate definition of tact is possible against this general and as it were psychological and cultural-theoretical background. Tact means a human activity and indeed someone’s secure, comprehensive attention to all that is occurring in the focus of their life in the moment. Tact consists in a “way of acting [...] which includes the full consideration of all circumstances relevant to a present motive for acting”.³² What is at stake is not only “mere knowledge of those circumstances” but also the ability to recognize effective ideas and rules in each situation. Tact is thus the social practice of the activity of apperception.

Attention to the situation at hand is the first element of tact, knowledge more generally, the ideas that lead action, is the second. Both elements in convergence lead to determining a measure that should prevail in action. What is at issue in the subjective regard is the discovery of all circumstances which relate to the action; what is at issue in an objective regard is a knowledge of the rules through which a certain measure of behaviour is gained. The “tactful one” is considerate of the feelings of all – this is in contrast to the virtuous one in Aristotle who only has regard for the few who are equal to him. Tactful action thus shows a “truly ethical feature”.³³ Lazarus sees yet a third element of tact: the choice and application of the means to be able to also practically apply attentiveness to the individual and the knowledge of general rules. Tact in this respect means someone’s partly physical and partly mental skill in the application of his or her disposition.

Now taking these three elements of tact together and putting them in the context of the previously discussed processes of apperception as the “condensation in thinking”, the following picture emerges: both conscious and unconscious processes interact in the psychical process such that Lazarus ventures to infer from the psychologically secured hypothesis that the most important processes in our interior happen wholly involuntarily, without our intention. “The laws of sociability, of melding and complication, the association and linkage and thus the series of formations of different kinds and the corresponding

³¹ Lazarus, “Der Tact”, pp. 34–35.

³² Lazarus, “Der Tact”, p. 15.

³³ Lazarus, “Der Tact”, p. 24.

reproduction take place entirely without the conscious intervention of our self.”³⁴ Lazarus refers to Hegel’s critique of empirical psychology (*Encyclopedia*, § 455³⁵) and to his fundamental misunderstanding of the “law of the association of ideas”. In his view, Hegel overlooks the fact that the inwardly formed general image must first be present and cannot be the product of active intelligence. For Lazarus the “laws of reproduction [are] themselves operative” as soon as our attention dwells on some object – the reflection of the understanding is always only an additional element here. A fundamental point of difference in the psychology of the 19th century is signalled with this.

Lazarus maintains that in dwelling on objects, especially in active access to the world outside us, the reproduction of intuitions takes place. This process does not occur arbitrarily (as Hegel critically remarks) but happens according to its own laws, laws that are always more precisely ascertained in the “measurements” of empirical psychology. It is thereby shown, on one hand, that at any given moment of time an “enormous number of representations” are possible for an individual but, on the other, that “only a small series of concepts [can be] clearly and consciously thought in every moment”.³⁶ Of the enormous amount of representations, some are efficacious of action even though they do not clearly enter into consciousness. This psychical fact must be taken into account in the psychological investigation of tact.

Lazarus recognizes a psychical phenomenon in tact that has a physiological basis (and is to that extent measurable). It also, though, has a spiritual moment, “the activity of apperception”. Tact has both natural and a cultural aspects to it. It belongs to the very “nature of tact” that it is an operation of the spirit in co-operation with unconscious representations that extend into the sensible-organic sphere. Thus tact implies an immediate linking of individual relations to the general law, a linking that is not directed by consciousness and belong to culture. The mediation of individuality and generality takes place in both domains. Thus there is a “natural linguistic tact” that enables “correct grammatical speech” without reflection on grammatical rules.³⁷ At the same time only the knowledge of rules and detachment from situated speech allows a command of linguistic form as is shown in “fine tact” at a higher level of cultural development shows. For the individual, it is a matter of finding a balance between nature and culture, between dark powers and conscious insight into the grounds of

34 Lazarus, “Der Tact”, p. 29. See Herbart, *Lehrbuch der Psychologie*, Part 1 “Grundlehre”, Chapter 3 “Von den Complexionen und Verschmelzungen”, pp. 16–26.

35 See Hegel, *Enzyklopädie*, pp. 262–265.

36 See Lazarus, “Der Tact”, pp. 31–33.

37 See Lazarus, “Der Tact”, pp. 41–46.

our behaviour. “In a word: when the representations that scarcely come in consciousness equally effect the judgement and resolution of the human being as the clear and consciousness representations do, then they have tact.”³⁸

Tact belongs to the “art of life” which makes the unconscious and creative element of life conscious and to retains it as recognized in lawful form (for example, as a grammatical rule). What is unconsciously directive of acting at the beginning is “settled in the soul” by reflection. The result of such a process, which draws the general process of condensation in thinking into a serviceability for life, is the “cultural human being” from moderation in their reflexes is expected. On a higher cultural level “self-mastery” is part of the “psychological signature of tact”.³⁹

In practical life contexts, tact is the element that wavers in regard to oppositions. It is thus on the same plane as humour which means that here we are dealing with another aspect of sociocultural apperception. Taken together both are, as it were, indicative for a level of cultivation of a society, that predominantly shows themselves in how social and cultural differences are dealt with. Humour and tact signal an attitude and a way of dealing with things whose forum is conversation. This shows itself in an impressive fashion in the context of language and culture. Both tact as well as humour are bound to a considerable degree to the medium of language.⁴⁰

The goal of cultural development generally and of the pedagogics correlated with this is the cultivation [*Kultivierung*] of the unclear, pre-conscious representations, that is, the culturization [*Kulturalisierung*] of human nature. The idea that the human being is by nature a cultural being, an idea found in various

38 Lazarus, “Der Tact”, p. 34. See also p. 54: “Life creates in the form of tact the dark and unconscious effective motives of idealism in action; science raises them to consciousness, thus makes them the norm, also for those who would not find them themselves, and thereby enables the masses to develop something new from or to forge something of them.” [*Das Leben schafft die dunkel und unbewußt in der Form des Tactes wirkenden Motive der Idealität im Handeln; die Wissenschaft erhebt sie zum Bewußtsein, macht sie dadurch zur Norm, auch für den, der sie selbst nicht finden würde, und befähigt wiederum die Massen, dadurch Neues daraus zu entwickeln oder daran anzuknüpfen.*”]

39 See Lazarus, “Der Tact”, p. 54–64. And also p. 65: “The recognition of the tact, here meant in the full sense [*Die Anerkennung des im vollen Sinne gedachten Tacts*], as an extraordinary gift or achievement thus has its sufficient reason: the soul must be completely illuminated by the noble and the beautiful if it is to be also pure, appropriate, aesthetic – tactful – in its unconscious actions.” See Herbart, *Lehrbuch der Psychologie*, First Part, “Grundlehre”, Chapter 3 “Von den Complexionen und Verschmelzungen”, pp. 21–29.

40 In current discourse on the practices of recognition and tolerance (Charles Taylor, Axel Honneth, Rainer Forst), these considerations were faded out. Analytic philosophy in particular offers hardly any approaches to cultural-theoretical reflection.

forms in the philosophical anthropology of the 20th century is already developed here in its main features. Lazarus outlines the panorama of a humanity that exposes its cultural differences and entrusts it to a tactful, that is a humane, being with one another. Keeping this end goal firmly in view we see a human condition characterized by the “noblest humane devotion [as the] basis of the sentiments [...] on which alone consummate, fine, secure tact can flourish”.⁴¹ For Hermann Cohen cultural progress is distinguished by its call for and encouragement of the vitality of moral activities. Cohen thus speaks of a “limit-idea of ethics” that refers us to aesthetic reflection. Ethics and aesthetics coincide at the point where the sought for harmony, security and stability in judgment articulates itself in an “appropriate tactfulness” towards our fellow humans.⁴²

5.3 Georg Simmel on Tact and Sociability

In a small treatise on the *Sociology of Sociability* [*Soziologie der Geselligkeit*] Simmel took up Lazarus’ basic idea and gave it a new twist.⁴³ He speaks of a natural human drive to sociability that underlies all socialization. That is to say that the latter is accompanied by the feeling “that the isolation of the individual is sublated in togetherness, in an association with others”.⁴⁴ The essence of sociability, “its body”, is composed of innumerable fundamental forms of relationships among human beings. In addition, there is the form of sociable relationship towards reality in which “a symbolic playful abundance of life” is also on reserve for deeper human beings. With this, we can state that socialization means the subsumption of the individual under a generality (morality, government/ state, and so on). However, in Simmel’s view, even in successful socialization the question of “what measure of significance and accent is attributed to the individual in as well as over and against the social surroundings” remains open.⁴⁵

41 Lazarus, “Der Tact”, p. 65.

42 See Cohen, *Ethik des reinen Willens*, p. 633.

43 See Simmel, “Soziologie der Geselligkeit”.

44 Simmel, “Soziologie der Geselligkeit”, p. 178. See Schleiermacher, “Theorie des geselligen Betragens”, on the concepts of “interaction [*Wechselwirkung*]”, “connection [*Verbindung*]”, “free activity [*freie Thätigkeit*]”. As background to this see Thouard, *Schleiermacher – Communauté, Individualité, Communication*, especially Chapter VIII: “Langage et Individualité”, pp. 213–235.

45 Simmel “Soziologie der Geselligkeit”, pp. 179–180.

This way of posing the question becomes virulent, according to Simmel, when the comprehensive restriction of the individual by real interests and by social forms becomes brittle.

But where this contingency is removed, another one takes place only from the form of coexistence where personal acuteness and self-mastery are reduced, so that a coexistence can be at all possible. The sense of tact is thereby of particular importance in society because it leads to the self-regulation of the individual in its personal relationships to others, in situations where no external or mediated egoistic interests take over the regulative role.⁴⁶

Simmel speaks of self-regulation where Herbart, Schleiermacher and Lazarus speak of self-mastery. He thus exchanges a moral-philosophical accentuation for a socio-technical one. That means, what is at stake is not the question of whether free will, self-obligation and so forth are possible but rather the question, which has fewer presuppositions, concerning the kind and way in which the internal and external differentiation of self and world takes place in the process.

From Simmel's perspective, "the specific achievement of tact [seems to be its] draw[ing] spiritual and external limits to the individual impulsiveness and emphasis on the I, that the right of the other demands".⁴⁷ Tact is always effective where an objective content of socialization (security, increase in prosperity) is missing and at the same time the unrestrained assertion of the personality is inhibited. This marks out an upper and lower threshold of sociability. Simmel places particular emphasis on an analogy between tact and right (in the Kantian sense). When the Kantian principle of right (in Schleiermacher's sense) is transferred to sociability it reads: Everyone should grant the maximum of social value to the other that is compatible with the maximum of value received by themselves.⁴⁸

Just as right is thoroughly democratic on that Kantian basis, so this principle shows the democratic structure of all sociability which, of course, every stratum of society can only realize in itself, and which frequently makes sociability between members of wholly different social classes something contradictory and embarrassing.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Simmel "Soziologie der Geselligkeit", pp. 180–181.

⁴⁷ Simmel "Soziologie der Geselligkeit", p. 181.

⁴⁸ See Schleiermacher, "Theorie des geselligen Betragens", p. 171: "the first quantitative law [...] reads thus: your social activity should always be kept inside the bounds in which alone a determinate society can exist as a whole."

⁴⁹ Simmel "Soziologie der Geselligkeit", p. 183.

No democracy is possible between those who are unequal and there is only a play of sociable democracy among those of equal standing. The world of sociability is an artificial world, sociability is nothing more – but also nothing less – than a game of socialization, in which we act as though equality were attainable. Those who act tactfully let the play of sociable democracy arise in conversation through the bracketing of all differences and contradictions. The aim is not to find a balance because the differences in fact remain but rather a preservation of one's self and of others, as Helmuth Plessner remarks, in the face of the irrevocability of real social and cultural contradictions.

The primal scene of sociability is conversation and in Simmel's conception it is, next to self-regard, the “purest, most sublime, and appropriate form of two-fold form [*Zweiseitigkeitsform*]” of interhuman relation. Larazus's considerations on the form of the ideal conversation are still an influence here, when Simmel declares conversation to be “the most adequate fulfilment of a relation that, so to speak, wants to be nothing but relation [*die sozusagen nichts als Relation sein will*]”. The condition is that the narrator wholly withdraws in their recounting of stories, jokes, anecdotes.⁵⁰ Only in the withdrawal of the personal moment is the narrator perceived as “tactful”. Only this reduction lets the human in general come to light, in which socially and culturally formed differences that have been developed historically, that is, the unclear and unconscious ground of particular form of culture, are overridden. Tactful dealings between individuals mean the liberation from all material contingency and immersion in a social relation “that wants to be nothing but relation”. Sociability, that is, a tactful behaviour towards others, is the image of a social ideal in miniature, an image that can be framed in Simmel's view in the paradoxical formulation of the “freedom of bondage [*Bindung*]”.⁵¹

Simmel's analysis of tact also contains a *cultural theory in miniature*. The choice of metaphors especially shows where this path should lead. Instead of the origin, it is the future that is at stake; instead of seriousness and content, lightness and form; instead of a determining, the task of determinability; instead

50 Simmel “Soziologie der Geselligkeit”, p. 188.

51 Simmel, “Soziologie der Geselligkeit”, p. 190. And he writes on p. 189: “It is hereby indicated that sociability is the playful form also for the ethical powers of the concrete society.” See also Hartung, *Die Naturrechtsdebatte*, on the natural obligation of freedom as regards origin and cultivated through tradition, in the concept of “*obligatio naturalis*” which is to be understood as a model from which Simmel's outline delimits itself. Also the latest attempt to connect Aristotelian and Kantian concepts in Trendelenburg's *Naturrecht auf dem Grunde der Ethik* does not know of “freedom of obligation”. See the further elaboration of this: Hartung “Deutschland im 19. Jahrhundert. Trendelenburgs Naturrechtskonzeption und ihre Wirkungsgeschichte”.

of manual skills, artistic talent; instead of the localization of substance, functional descriptions. In brief, what is at issue is not being and being a certain way [*So-Sein*] but rather human activity itself. Simmel formulated the image a human liberation in the event of linguistic encounter. The liberating and unburdening, however, that more profound human being find in sociability, is:

That community and reciprocation of influence in which all the tasks and gravity of life are realised can be enjoyed here in quasi-artistic play, in that simultaneous sublimization and rarefaction, in which the forces of reality, rich in content, resonate only in the distance, evaporating their gravity into a stimulus.⁵²

The discovery and analysis of “tact” is certainly closely linked with an experience of cultural difference. Therefore, it is no wonder that it is especially cultural theorists who stand in the charged relation between Germanness and Judaism and who think about the form of “togetherness” in which material oppositions – of origin, social situation, legal status, morality and confession – are converted and transferred into a form. These theorists refer us to the premises on which a modern society, whose norms do not come from tradition and origin, can be held together: human depth, that articulates itself in conversation and manifests itself in education [*Bildung*]. They thus assume an impulse that was already in effect in the time of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. Kant, Schleiermacher and Herbart coined the concepts and the demands bound up with them. Schleiermacher especially calls for a social form of living together in heterogeneous social structures whose essential characteristics are openness and futurity as opposed to feudal delimitation and fixation with the origin. Lazarus and Simmel remember this programme at a time which had moved away from the ideals of the Enlightenment. They also remember that this programme comes with a price, namely, a commitment to language [*ein Bekenntnis zur Sprache*] whose integrative power Lazarus emphasizes and of education whose value Simmel could not esteem highly enough. Language and education are the conditions for a successful conversation between “equals” in the democratic game with real differences. Whoever acts tactfully knows of what separates and creates what unifies in tact as the “form of form”.⁵³

⁵² Simmel, “Soziologie der Geselligkeit”, p. 192. Compare Schleiermacher, “Theorie des geselligen Betragens”, p. 175, who calls for “a certain elasticity, a proficiency in superficiality, that one offers to society, that extend to requirements” for the “social perfection” of the participants in social coexistence.

⁵³ Simmel, “Soziologie der Geselligkeit”, p. 192. And for an example from practical life, see the a striking impressive quote from Margarete Susman’s *Ich habe viele Leben gelebt*, pp. 52–53:

5.4 Helmuth Plessner on the “Wisdom of Tact”

Working against the background of Lazarus’ and Simmel’s concepts, the philosopher and sociologist Helmuth Plessner carried out a brilliant analysis of the socio-political efficacy of tact in his *The Limits of Society – A Critique of Social Radicalism* [*Grenzen der Gemeinschaft – Eine Kritik des sozialen Radikalismus*] (1924). In his view tact is among to those strategies by which a radicalization of the social conditions can be avoided. It thus has a hygienic function, it first enables social intercourse and fashions it in a gentle way. Tact is in a sense a form of social internal diplomacy. Plessner gives three descriptions of tact. First, tact is the “capacity of perceiving incalculable differences, the ability to conceive the untranslatable language of appearances which talk about situations, persons without words in their constellation, in their behaviour, their physiognomy according to the inscrutable symbols of life”. Second, what is at issue is “the readiness to respond to the subtlest vibrations of the environment, the willing openness to see others and to remove oneself from view, to measure others according to their measure and not with one’s own”. Third, we designate the “eternally waking respect for other soul and thus the first and last virtue of the human heart” with tact.⁵⁴

Tact signals a process of “individual respect for the alien and the self”. Instead of falling into the oppositions of truth and false opinions, tactful dealings with people ensure that the other is spared, if need be, the judgmental nature of the truth. The zone of tactful conversation opposed to the “coldness of space” of those who unsparingly tell the truth.⁵⁵ Plessner indicates that tact marks the intermediate region between familiarity and strangeness. The borders are unclear here and must be determined in the respective situation. His reflections on the “wisdom of tact: sparing of the other for the sake of myself, sparing of myself for the sake of the other are marvellous.”⁵⁶ In tactful action we bridge the groundlessness of our being together which is in the interstices of commitment to family, club, party and so on and is, as Simmel shows, the paradoxical basis of sociability. Plessner also indicates what measure is necessary in lacking natural-

“Simmel’s house’s the receptions, the weekly ‘Jours’ wholly originated in the communal spirit of their culture. They were a sociological creation in miniature: that of a sociability whose meaning lay in the fostering of the highest individuality. There, conversation had a form in which no one was allowed to bring their own peculiarities, problems and needs that, released from all difficulties, drifted in an atmosphere of intellectuality, gentleness and tact.”

54 Plessner, *Grenzen der Gemeinschaft – Eine Kritik des sozialen Radikalismus*, p. 107.

55 On the metaphors of “cold”, see Lethen, *Verhaltenstheorien der Kälte*.

56 Plessner, *Grenzen der Gemeinschaft – Eine Kritik des sozialen Radikalismus*, p. 109.

ness and acquired artifice, in loss of familiarity and the ability to distance oneself, in the absent penetration of complex social structures and at the same time the competence for differentiation that is necessary to bring about tactful activity. It thus remains the exception to the rule, the non-self-evident. “Numbness of soul, blindness of the soul, the monomaniac, who takes every opportunity for himself or the absolute no”, that is the socially normal case.⁵⁷

Even though Plessner does not address this, because he sees himself as committed to a realistic standpoint, nonetheless his concept of tact (and also of diplomacy) presupposes a high degree of idealization. The withdrawal in social space so as to consider others rests on the ability to distance oneself from and objectify one’s own standpoint. The 19th century spoke of education in the sense of the Enlightenment and neo-humanism and accorded this ideal a socio-cultural position. Plessner resists this narrowing down and aims at the uncovering of human behavioural structures in general. It is true that the “willing openness” of which Plessner speaks is not a natural human condition but its natural artifice can be acquired at all times as well as being capable of being lost at any time. On Plessner’s view every human being, in whatever socio-cultural context they are located, is in the position to be able to summon up the necessary power of distancing and differentiation. What is at issue is an endurance of the groundlessness of action as well as the lack of clear options for acting. Acting persons are required to practice a self-understanding and a dealing with one another that manages without making the absolutes of the true/false into a directive. We can recognize here the basic feature of Plessner’s political anthropology which he worked out in later years.⁵⁸ What is decisive and well-nigh astonishing here is that the determination of tact as social form that was developed in the psychological and sociological studies of the 19th century and was guided by an idealization of the real political problems of social differentiation and the cultural experience of strangeness, is drawn by Plessner into the field of anthropological reflection. That consequentially meant an intensification of the problematic because now every human being stands before the task of coping with the social, political and cultural conflicts in which it is embroiled without recourse to established behavioural patterns. Tactful behaviour is thus a showing of a general existential-anthropological crisis that is overcome, of the idealization of one’s own behaviour as the condition for the sparing of others and one’s self.

⁵⁷ Plessner, *Grenzen der Gemeinschaft – Eine Kritik des sozialen Radikalismus*, pp. 109–110.

⁵⁸ See Plessner, *Macht und menschliche Natur. Ein Versuch zur Anthropologie der geschichtlichen Weltansicht*.

In the field of idealizations there is neither true nor false but only success or failure. However, we can, with the cultural pessimist Adorno, add an epilogue to this small history, that takes into account the socio-political facts of the 20th century and in this way interpret the tension in social phenomenon of tact as a paradox of ideal and real forms. It then becomes clear that the ideals of the Enlightenment always document their failure where they are accompanied by human tactlessness. This insight is certainly timelessly valid for who would doubt that a lack of education reveals itself in the deficient capacity for psychical internal and external social differentiation. Accordingly the premises formulated by Kant, through Herbart down up to Lazarus, Simmel and Plessner remain in effect, for our discourse on the human implies the capacity for self-mastery. Adorno refers us to the abyss of human life for good reasons, but his resignation is the expression of an indigestible fatalism. Yet there is no dispensation from the incessant effort that Lazarus, Simmel and Plessner have demanded – an effort so “that the air which we breath in conversation is pure and free” (Lazarus), thus that something can happen in the encounter with other human beings that we can conceive as the opening of new horizons and a chance for a free, albeit playful, dealing with other human beings.

6 At the Limits of the ‘Critique of Language’ – Fritz Mauthner

Language has become a great city. [...] Language is held in common. All belongs to all, all bathe in it, all drink of it, and all exude it.
(Fritz Mauthner)¹

“All philosophy is a ‘critique of language’ (though not in Mauthner’s sense)”.² There is a reference to this famous dictum from the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) in nearly every study of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s work. However, the part of the sentence in parentheses is not always cited. How is the peculiar reference in the *Tractatus* (4.0031), which speaks of two forms of “the critique of language”, supposed to signal a difference to Fritz Mauthner’s work?³ This question will be addressed in the following pages for they discuss the mostly covert historical influence of the scholar Fritz Mauthner.

What does Mauthner understand by “the critique of language”? Does it concern a programme for scientific linguistics, for philosophical or cultural critique? Is there a substantive relationship to Wittgenstein’s project in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* from 1921 (more than one such relationship is speculative and hardly reliable for philosophical consideration⁴)? If the question can be affirmatively answered, then a further question follows: Why has Mauthner been designated a place in the great library of (almost) forgotten thinkers?

Without a doubt, Fritz Mauthner is one of the most colourful personalities of his time and, as regards to the breadth of his scientific programme, from Steintal to Simmel, he in no way falls short of the other figures examined in his study.⁵ Mauthner commemorated his origins in Bohemia in his essay *Mother-Tongue and Fatherland [Muttersprache und Vaterland]* (1920). He there sketches the “linguistic menagerie [*Sprachmengerei*]” of Bohemia and the drawback of

1 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 1, p. 27.

2 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 4.0031, p. 33. English translation from Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (trans D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness).

3 Initial approaches can be found in Weiler, *Mauthner’s Critique of Language*, pp. 298–306; Kühn, *Gescheiterte Sprachkritik*, pp. 95–97; Gustafsson, *Sprache und Lüge*, pp. 135–147.

4 See Janik and Toulmin, *Wittgenstein’s Vienna*.

5 See the contributions in Leinfellner and Thuncke (eds.), *Brückenschlag zwischen den Disziplinen*. Eschenbacher, *Fritz Mauthner und die deutsche Literatur um 1900*, especially the biographical overview in Chapter 1, pp. 8–16.

being brought up without a “mother tongue”, which latter nurtures [*ernährt*] human beings like a “natural nutrient”.⁶ The memories of the ancestral Judaism are distant, and the Yiddish language too is a mere reminder of this tradition. Mauthner only gives vague indications of this biographical background in his *Memoirs*.⁷ Max Brod judges Mauthner's antipathy to his Judaism within the horizon of a generation:

Of course Mauthner had the most decisive horror about Judaism in particular. This was the way of thinking of those born in 1849, completely alienated from Judaism, the “emancipated” of the Enlightenment. Each and all, they believed themselves to be free from prejudices, genuine sceptics.⁸

If Brod's ascription seems to be all too bold and simple [*plakativ*], it nonetheless strikes a significant point with respect to Mauthner: The search for a free, genuine scepticism can in fact be seen Mauthner's life-long preoccupation.⁹

The three-volume *Contributions to the Critique of Language* [*Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*] appeared in 1901 and 1902 and represents a record of comprehensive studies on linguistics, philosophy and cultural history. With the contributions Mauthner hoped for a breakthrough as a scientific critic but instead he reaped the silence of the academic public.¹⁰ In his study *Scepticism and Mysticism – An Attempt in Connection with Mauthner's Linguistic Critique* [*Skepsis und Mystik – Versuche im Anschluss an Mauthners Sprachkritik*] (1903), Gustav Landauer undertook the attempt to bolster his friend.¹¹ The friendship with Landauer continued in these years, albeit interrupted by some disagreement. Differences between the friends were signalled through their political views and their attitude towards Judaism. For Mauthner, Judaism was not part of his social reality. “Became drawn into a lightening-stupid thing, ‘Ost and West’ [*East and West* (Journal for Modern Judaism)] brought out a moderate article on me; immediately a fuss by the Jews: I am ‘baptized’, an anti-Semite, and so on. I should express

6 See Mauthner, *Muttersprache und Vaterland*, especially p. 19.

7 See Mauthner, *Erinnerungen – Prager Jugendjahre*.

8 See Brod, *Der Prager Kreis*, p. 41.

9 On the social- and literary-historical background, see Jacques Le Rider, *Unveröffentlichtes Manuskript über Mauthners Leben und Werk*.

10 See Mauthner, “Sprachkritik” in his *Wörterbuch der Philosophie – Neue Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, Vol. 2, pp. 442–444. This article only serves as a settling of accounts the (in Mauthner's opinion mistaken or irrelevant) critiques of his main work on the philosophy of language.

11 See Landauer, *Skepsis und Mystik*. On this see Michael Franz in “Skepsis und Enthusiasmus – Gustav Landauers ‘Anschluß’ an Fritz Mauthner”.

myself [...].”¹² While Landauer advised “once again present your position in this serious matter, and incidentally energetically emphasize that you are not baptized”,¹³ Mauthner blustered about arrogant Rabbis and heavy-handed antisemitism and vehemently opposed the insinuation that his thinking is defined by a religious confession and a so-called membership to a race. That is his “coarse answer” to all such impositions.¹⁴

An essay on *Language* [*Die Sprache*] appeared in 1906/1907 on Landauer’s suggestion (to whom it was also dedicated).¹⁵ In the following I want present Mauthner’s conception of the critique of language, of which the short essay *Language* presents only a summary, from the context of his main work, the three-volume *Contributions to the Critique of Language* and to develop the theoretical and historical horizon of language and culture already opened up [*vor dem bereits entfalteten*].

6.1 Mauthner’s Contributions to the Critique of Language (1901–2)

At the beginning of the 20th century three volumes of the *Contributions to Linguistic Critique* [*Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*] appeared that respectively deal with the topics “Language and Psychology” (Vol. 1), “On Linguistics” (Vol. 2) and “Grammar and Logic” (Vol. 3).¹⁶ Mauthner had taken the opportunity of giving a characterization of his philosophy for the series *Contemporary Philosophy in Self-Depiction* [*Die Philosophie der Gegenwart in Selbstdarstellungen*], “giving

12 Mauthner’s “Brief an Landauer (17.05.1906)” in: Delf and Schöps (eds.), *Gustav Landauer – Fritz Mauthner. Briefwechsel 1890–1919*, p. 128.

13 Landauer’s “Brief an Mauthner (18.05.1906)” in: Delf and Schöps (eds.), *Gustav Landauer – Fritz Mauthner. Briefwechsel 1890–1919*, p. 128. Mauthner’s answer to this (on the 21.05.1906) makes unmistakable clear that he advocates a separation of “race” and “religion” where he positions himself in a racial-biological classification but rejects, as a “preacher of atheism” membership of the Judaic religion.

14 Mauthner’s “Brief an Landauer (21.05.1906)” in: Delf and Schöps (eds.), *Gustav Landauer – Fritz Mauthner. Briefwechsel 1890–1919*, p. 130.

15 Landauer’s “Brief an Mauthner (22.05.1906)” in: Delf and Schöps (eds.), *Gustav Landauer – Fritz Mauthner. Briefwechsel 1890–1919*, p. 131: “I have a proposal concerning your participation in Buber’s undertaking [...]: At different points in the work you refuse to extend the “critique of language” to *morality*. You should take this opportunity to do just that. For morality and “society” is just one and the same. Think about it [*Überlege Dir’s!*]”

16 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*. An analysis of this work can be found in Weiler, *Mauthner’s Critique of Language*, especially pp. 269–306, and Kühn, “Gescheiterte Sprachkritik”, in: Delf and Schöps (eds.), *Gustav Landauer – Fritz Mauthner. Briefwechsel 1890–1919*, pp. 51–89.

an account of the origin of linguistic-critical thought”.¹⁷ He mentions here that his interest in a critique of language dates back to 1872.

Mauthner makes very clear what is at issue for him beginning in the first pages of the second volume in the section “What is linguistics?”.¹⁸ He claims to be providing a theory of human culture, a “correct cultural history of humanity [as a] history of human thoughts, of human words, illusions, dogmas (not only religious)”.¹⁹ This claim is all encompassing. All that human beings think and have thought should be summoned and judged before the court of the critique of language. A process of linguistic self-purification will take place as a result that, however, will not be accompanied by the construction of a new fundament but further advances in the critical-destructive intent. Mauthner's purification of language from all grammatical-ontological presumptions, from the categorical application of individual words, from the substantivized persistence of individual forms of words and from “word-monsters” *per se* leads to a detachment from language. Mauthner's linguistic scepticism is radical, it refers to an altogether alternative view of language that offers a choice between resigned silence and redemptive deed.

In Mauthner's view, previous research in the humanities (and really intellectual culture in its entirety) had succumbed to a basic error. Under the guidance of the philosophers, for centuries a double unity of the world had been set down, a unity that consists of the categories of actuality on the one hand and the general rules of thinking and speaking on the other. An analogy or congruence should exist between this external and internal world according to this widespread view. Mauthner recognizes a basic error here, an incredible “foolishness”, for research results show that “different people or languages do not only use different words or concepts but also a different discursive structure or logic”.²⁰ The illusion of a fundamental logic of thinking and speaking also disintegrates in the face of this diversity of languages. There is a gap between thinking and speaking on the one hand and the “actual” events on the other. All theorizing about the ten categories of Aristotle's logic, the completeness of Kant's table of the categories or the possibility of an ideal language in Romanticism seem absurd and dangerous to Mauthner.

17 Mauthner, “Fritz Mauthner”, p. 127.

18 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 2, pp. 1–31.

19 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 2, p. 12. See Weiler, *Mauthner's Critique of Language*, p. 273: “Mauthner's critique of language is, therefore, a critique exercised upon language (Kritik an der Sprache).”

20 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 2, pp. 21–22. See Eschenbacher, *Fritz Mauthner und die deutsche Literatur um 1900*, pp. 48–54.

Mauthner gave a pointed representation of his position, through which he wants to take on Western intellectual history, in a small brochure entitled *Aristotle – An Unhistorical Essay* [*Aristoteles – ein unhistorischer Essay*] (1904).²¹ Mauthner polemically poses the question – to himself and to his reader – of how it can be that a writer, over and beyond the time that has passed, can still hold as a teacher under the conditions of modern, differentiated scientific landscape. Where does this “name superstition” that is associated with the “phonetic sequence [*Lautgruppe*]: Aristotle” come from?²² His answer sounds thoroughly provocative: We adhere to Aristotle as the father of logic because we do not want to set ourselves the task of writing “an actual history of logic, a history of human thinking, thus of the human brain”.²³ This equation of the activity of thinking and nerve processes in the brain seems to fulfil all the criteria of a vulgar materialism but Mauthner supplements it by equating thinking and language and thereby escapes (making) a deterministic point via the other equation of the activity of thinking and complex linguistic events.²⁴

Excursus on the History of the Categories

The linguistic philosopher Mauthner cites 19th century research literature. He names Carl von Prantl’s *History of Logic in the West* [*Geschichte der Logik im Abendlande*] (1855–1870), Friedrich Adolf Trendelenburg’s *History of the Doctrine of the Categories* [*Geschichte der Kategorienlehre*] (1846) and Rudolf Eucken’s essay *On Aristotle’s Use of Language* [*Über den Sprachgebrauch des Aristoteles*] (1868). He emphasizes that astute scholars are at work here. Over the centuries Aristotle was rightly seen as the exemplar of a great philosopher and nevertheless earned merit as a naturalist. “However, what Aristotle can well be reproached for is his willing subjection to the word.”²⁵ The accusation of belief in the word [*Wortgläubigkeit*] is the core of Mauthner’s polemic against

21 Mauthner, “Aristoteles – ein unhistorischer Essay”.

22 Mauthner, “Aristoteles – ein unhistorischer Essay”, p. 5.

23 Mauthner, “Aristoteles – ein unhistorischer Essay”, p. 6. On this see also Mauthner’s excellent article on the topic of history, “Geschichte” in his *Wörterbuch der Philosophie – Neue Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, Vol. 1, pp. 399–435.

24 Mauthner, “Aristoteles – ein unhistorischer Essay”, p. 7. On this see Steinthal, *Einleitung in die Psychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*, p. 85: “Language is not a thing, a powder, but an event, like an explosion; it is not an organ, such as the eye or ear, but a capacity and activity, such as seeing and hearing. So it was and so it is at all times.”

25 Mauthner, “Aristoteles – ein unhistorischer Essay”, p. 20.

Aristotle and his modern revenants. He accuses them of a rage for order and pedantry. His doctrine of the categories especially is the result of statistical evaluations. Instead of having expanded human language and with this cultural memory through discoveries and new descriptions, Aristotle had only summarized it. His doctrine of the ten categories as the basic structure of human thinking and speaking was already critically highlighted by Kant as merely “rounded them up” and by Hegel as “compilation”.

However, Trendelenburg, the Aristotle of the 19th century,²⁶ had first in his *History of the Doctrine of the Categories* [*Geschichte der Kategorienlehre*] (1846) projected a great panorama from antiquity to modernity with the goal of maintaining the predominance of Aristotelian philosophy for our present.²⁷ Trendelenburg attempts to grasp the genesis of validity of basic philosophical concepts in their interconnectedness. The starting position in modernity signals a blank space as regards this issue. Kant had taken the question of how synthetic a priori judgments are possible as a point of departure so as to direct research into the categories towards the “question of the inner possibility and the source of knowledge”.²⁸ It is true that the categories established by him as the “root concepts of the understanding” exhibit an internal logic because they are understood as necessary components of judgmental thinking. However, their validity seems to be merely subjective and they do not have any genesis, which latter weighs heavily on Trendelenburg.

This deficiency is, on his view, avoided by Hegel, when he understands the categories as eternal concepts underlying things which thinking uncovers in a creative act. Here metaphysics and logic fall together. However, the experience of which Hegel speaks is only an experience in which thinking constitutes in its own genesis. It is not a real experience that is grounded in intuition.²⁹ Herbart on the other hand only sees a psychical mechanism for the reproduction of our representations in the categories, which they certainly are, but not only – and thus leaves the productive impulse in intuition and thinking out of consideration. He accordingly blanks out the question concerning the logical and metaphysical validity of the categories.

26 See Petersen, *Die Philosophie Friedrich Adolf Trendelenburgs*.

27 See Eucken, *Ueber die Bedeutung der Aristotelischen Philosophie für die Gegenwart*.

28 See Trendelenburg, *Erläuterungen zu den Elementen der aristotelischen Logik*, § 3, pp. 3–6, here, p. 5; also his “*Elementa Logices Aristotelicae*”, § 3, pp. 1–2; also his *Logische Untersuchungen*, Vol. 1, pp. 332ff.; Vol. 2, pp. 142ff.; and his *Geschichte der Kategorienlehre*, pp. 196ff. On Trendelenburg's work, see Hartung and Köhnke (eds.), *Friedrich Adolf Trendelenburgs Wirkung*.

29 Trendelenburg, *Logische Untersuchungen*, Vol. 1, pp. 332–335.

The result of a history of the doctrine of the categories is that the dominant approaches are one-sided. Their one-sidedness consists in not understanding their origin. Hegel came close to this sort of understanding, leading Trendelenburg to say approvingly: “Hegel’s claim of genealogy remains standing.”³⁰ His mistake lies on another level for he constructed this system of the categories and didn’t just encounter the categories in the sciences. To see these shortcomings is to recognize the necessity for a new foundation of the doctrine of the categories. Generally formulated, the categories are the basic concepts of our thinking that give a foothold to all other concepts. They are the component parts of judgmental thinking but not its products. They are “reoccurring determinations under which, like higher powers, all our thinking, whether in the concrete or the abstract, is subject to”.³¹

The doctrine of the categories – on Trendelenburg’s understanding – erects a separation of the real categories (with which we grasp the being of things) from the modal categories (that are bound to the act of knowledge). On his conception, substance and quantum are real categories while possibility is a modal category. The task of logic is that of determining the difference and unity of these categories “for the basic concepts are either basic concepts of being or of thinking”. It depends on both aspects. If thinking were not in relation to the order of beings, then it would be entangled in itself. However, according to Trendelenburg, it bears “the possibility of a community with things in itself”.³² Trendelenburg traces this community back to a basic activity that surpasses thinking and makes knowledge possible. He speaks of a “constructive movement” that lies at the basis of both the emergence of things as well as of cognitive production. Categories are nothing other than the products of a “mediating activity” between the levels of being and of thinking; thus they are also “not imaginary figures, not invented guides but basic concepts that are objective and subjective in equal measure”.³³

The problem of the genesis of the categories remains. As with all concepts, the categories too are formed by observation; however, they are more than the mere reproduction of external relationships but the result of cognitive productivity. “Because they recur in all, they trace themselves for the spirit like the main strokes of a drawing. It cannot be otherwise.”³⁴ Analogously to the formation of

30 Trendelenburg, *Logische Untersuchungen*, Vol. 1, p. 335.

31 Trendelenburg, *Logische Untersuchungen*, Vol. 1, p. 332.

32 Trendelenburg, *Geschichte der Kategorienlehre*, p. 365.

33 Trendelenburg, *Geschichte der Kategorienlehre*, p. 368.

34 Trendelenburg, *Logische Untersuchungen*, Vol. 1, p. 388. On Trendelenburg’s position in the history of logic, see Vilkkio, *A Hundred Years of Logic in 19th Century Germany*, pp. 49–75.

language, Trendelenburg shows how “logical thought” is gradually formed from out “chaotic mass of representations”, like the “fixed forms” that are only gradually to be recognized “in the swimming sea of sounds”.³⁵ Regarded in its whole and generally, logic learned much from grammar. Both sciences are almost twins. In particular, the derivation of the categories in Aristotle appears compelling insofar as it starts from the structure of the proposition, that is, of judgment, of spoken discourse, then the elements of judgment, that is, the parts of the proposition are isolated and finally the general structure of the propositional statement are determined: the categories of substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, position, state, action and affection. According to Trendelenburg, Aristotle shows in an exemplary fashion that the real genesis of the categories is coupled to the development of language. “For the categories, as it seems, are found by Aristotle from the analysis of the proposition, thus they permit a comparison with the parts of speech that were only completely established after Aristotle.”³⁶

The claim that Aristotle had followed “a grammatical guideline”³⁷ in his doctrine of the categories earned Trendelenburg some criticism from Heinrich August Ritter, Eduard Zeller and Hermann Bonitz down to Franz Brentano.³⁸ He is completely aware of the objection that was directed against Aristotle, namely that his table of the ten categories is incomplete and indeterminate – “One sees not, from where they come or where they proceed. Thus it happened that Kant regarded them as ‘rounded ... up’ and Hegel regarded them a mere ‘compilation’”³⁹ – can also be directed against him and cannot be invalidated through a reference to the development of language. The mere empiricism of linguistic research only allows ontological hypotheses. Thus there are critical remarks directed against Aristotle in Trendelenburg’s work as well, for in Aristotle the conflict between logical subsumption and the real genesis of categories remains unresolved.⁴⁰

With polemical aim Mauthner now skewers this inconsistency and speaks of a “childish philosophy of language” as the basis of the doctrine of the categories and of Aristotle’s obvious “servitude to language”.⁴¹ Mauthner’s examination of

35 Trendelenburg, *Geschichte der Kategorienlehre*, p. 179.

36 Trendelenburg, *Erläuterungen zu den Elementen der aristotelischen Logik*, § 3, pp. 3–4.

37 Trendelenburg, *Geschichte der Kategorienlehre*, p. 180.

38 On this see Bonitz, *Über die Kategorien des Aristoteles*. Brentano, *Von der mannigfachen Bedeutung des Seienden nach Aristoteles*, pp. 72–88.

39 Trendelenburg, *Geschichte der Kategorienlehre*, p. 10.

40 Trendelenburg, *Geschichte der Kategorienlehre*, p. 189.

41 Mauthner, “Aristoteles – ein unhistorischer Essay”, p. 48.

the Aristotelian doctrine of the categories in its revitalized 19th century form is an example of how brilliant analysis and wild polemic go hand in hand in his work. On the one hand he emphasizes the significance of linguistic-philosophical reflection on the status of the categories and concedes to Trendelenburg the discovery that the categories designate original parts of speech; on the other hand, he sees the beginning of a century-long history of confusion – categories, in his view, are no more than grammatical forms – and he advocates, in view of the conceptual history of the categories, for the freest, great laughter to take effect.⁴² But what remains when the genesis of the categories is denounced as the mere solidification of linguistic habits (“force of inertia”)? Is their claim to validity also completely rescinded?

Mauthner’s announcement of Aristotle’s “grammatical and epistemological innocence” and “childish gossip” remains on the level of mere indications.

All attempts [...] to give a meaning to Aristotle’s categories that is deeper than the linguistic will, with time, cease to make a serious impression. Should I attempt to summarize my critical remarks on the categories in a few words, I would say: Aristotle’s plan of bringing the most abstract linguistic analogies into agreement with the most general analogies of the actual world, failed and had to fail miserably [...], thus we arrive at [...] a much more important result, i.e., that the most general concepts of language do not and cannot correspond with the most general analogies of actuality for there are not categories of actuality.⁴³

6.2 The Origination and Development of Language

We are not only dealing with linguistic scepticism but with a general and deep mistrust of the human capacity to know actuality. According to Mauthner, we do not know how the world is “in itself”. Kant’s epistemological scepticism impacts him too. However, while Kant emphasized [*herausgestellt*] the categorical form of human knowledge and while the categorical meaning of linguistic knowledge of the world was investigated in Humboldt’s linguistic-critical turn, Mauthner’s mistrust is directed against language as the medium of knowledge of actuality as such. The suspicion of the illusionary nature of all human actuality is like a basic melody of his writings on linguistic critique.

A consequence of linguistic critique is signalled in the statement that language is “metaphorical in its form”. In the radically sceptical formulation that implies that “all language is not ignorance [*Nichtwissen*], all language by its na-

42 Mauthner, “Aristoteles – ein unhistorischer Essay”, p. 48.

43 Mauthner, “Aristoteles – ein unhistorischer Essay”, p. 61.

ture, must be figurative, metaphorical”.⁴⁴ Mauthner does not acquire this result of his linguistic-critical investigations by developing and testing his arguments. Rather he works through the opposed position and emphasizes its deficiencies. Humboldtian linguistic philosophy and its formation into a school by Heymann Steinthal and the vicinity of the *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft* belong to the opposed positions from the 19th century. Mauthner also recognizes a deep ambivalence of discovery and dissimulation in Humboldt. “Now here Humboldt puts down a new word ghost, the unclear concept of an inner linguistic form [innere Sprachform] – Steinthal first criticizes it, then takes it over.”⁴⁵

Yet Humboldt’s idea is not entirely false. Contemporary linguistic research has appropriated this “illuminating thought” of Humboldt’s, namely that every human being has his or her own inner form of language.⁴⁶ With the concept of the inner form of language what is really meant is only the acquired and inherited treasury of experience as it is bound to experience and in which is always individual. “Humboldt, however, secretly cannot get rid of the thought of a common inner form of language for humanity.”⁴⁷ It is the same with his students, who speak in favour of a determination of cultural forms of the language and indeed of the language in its objective, trans-individual form as a constitutive cultural power. Mauthner sees danger here in that it is paradoxically in the name of a “proud” inner form of language that the individual is delivered over to external powers (cultural system, society, order and so on). He recognizes the same danger in the influence of Darwinism on linguistics.⁴⁸ A reduction of the activity of speech to physical stimuli and the subsequent derivation of a social function of language misses the essence of language. On Mauthner’s view the physical generation of individual, physiological organs of speech are only language when sounds between human beings receive an “exchange value”. Thus language has its place not in human nature nor in a spirit that hovers over all human beings but rather originates in the intermediate zone of social interaction. “We now

⁴⁴ Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 2, p. 29. One can speak of an ideological-critical impulse of Mauthner’s critique of language in this context. This has been insufficiently discussed hitherto, see Kurzreiter, *Sprachkritik als Ideologiekritik bei Fritz Mauthner*, especially pp. 95–103.

⁴⁵ Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 2, pp. 58–59.

⁴⁶ This claim makes it clear that Mauthner’s interest in philosophical-linguistic considerations ignored wide stretches of research in linguistics in the second half of the late 19th century or at any rate underestimated their significance. On the broader context, see Trabant, “Ideelle Bezeichnung. Steinthals Humboldt-Kritik”.

⁴⁷ Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 2, p. 59.

⁴⁸ See Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 2, pp. 74 ff.

first see [i. e. after the polemical-critical dismissal of other positions] the significance of our claim that language was something between human beings from the beginning.”⁴⁹

Before Mauthner arrives at the meaning of this “between”, he advances his linguistic critique further. He directs his attention to the exorcism of two phantoms that his opponent always seeks to resurrect, one being a phantom of the “discovery of the origin” and the other that of the “concept of linguistic affinity [*Sprachverwandtschaft*]”.⁵⁰ In a rapid excursus of philosophical reflection on the origin of language since 1850, since which time Condillac, Maupertius, Rousseau and Herder have dominated the scene, Mauthner lays out specifically how (although we have become accustomed to formulating questions of origin as analyses of development) even seeing how speculative assumptions on the divine or natural origin of language have stepped into the background, we nonetheless do not have a clear image of the concept of development.⁵¹ A new ghost, a mythical creature, walks abroad in linguistics. “For the scholars of Indo-European the word Ur-language mean a mythical creature, the language, which the original Aryan people, whose existence has not been proven, are supposed to have spoken at a time we do not know.”⁵²

Mauthner explicitly refers to the linguist August Schleicher and emphasizes his “fixation on an Ur-form of Ur-language” and the false analogy he gives of a “developmental theory of the organic as the model for of the developmental theory of language”.⁵³ In razor sharp fashion, he recognizes that in this debate the development of all life and thus also the development of linguistic forms is associated with but without moving analytically too close to the “magic word”. He does not thereby dispute the principle of development but directs his criticism against the assumption that a general human nature or the people – as an alleged natural unity – is the bearer of development. If we assume ontogenesis as a stenographic image of phylogenesis, as Haeckel and Schleicher do, then the Ur-language is dissolved – because ontogenetically considered all language, according to Mauthner, is individual language. We are always dealing with the origination of single living beings (organisms) that develop under the guidance of hereditary and adaption. Thus languages too developed under the guidance of individual inheritance and the formation of analogies.⁵⁴

49 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 2, p. 79.

50 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 2, p. 115.

51 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 2, pp. 339–340.

52 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 2, p. 375.

53 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 2, p. 379 and p. 381. See Chapters 1 and 2 above.

54 See Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 2, p. 416.

The origination of language is not to be thought of in any other way than as “something between human beings”.⁵⁵ All theories of language, including notions such as the interjection theory or onomatopoeia, do not explain the origination of language. According to Mauthner, this too cannot be explained but only described. The origin of language lies somewhere in the dreams of pre-history and can also only be fabricated in dreaming.⁵⁶ That is why serious researchers have turned away from the phantasy of fathoming the Ur-language. No longer is the question “how did the human Ur-language sound/ What was the human Ur-language?” but rather “What forces were or which solitary force was effective as human beings first created language?”⁵⁷

At this point Mauthner pushes forth to the elucidation of the Enlightenment and its lines of influence. In secular times too ghosts continue to live. These ghosts no longer serve speculative phantasy, as with the thought of a pre-Babylonian language, but nonetheless our scientific age too has not outgrown the tendency to construct legends. The new form of the belief in ghosts is the legend of “the Aryan people and the Aryan Ur-language”.⁵⁸ Such legends are, as Mauthner regretfully ascertains, immune to being dispatched scientifically and survive in the writings of popular science. And that is associated with considerable socio-political consequences.

Besides, let me draw your attention to the fact that this fabrication, just like other religious convictions, became practicable for cultural history, insofar as the renescent anti-Semitism praises itself to no small degree for speaking of Aryans and non-Aryan and giving this name to its hatred of Jews instead of simply crying “hep hep” as in bygone days.⁵⁹

Mauthner refers to the American linguist William Dwight Whitney (and could just as well refer to Humboldt and Steinthal) when he denies that neither original racial diversity nor the unity of humankind in one pair can be proven from existing linguistic differences. He has only scorn for such attempt. He saw in the so-called “Aryan question [...] the task of drawing room prattle”⁶⁰ and sees in the hypothesis of an Aryan Ur-language “a doctoral question, a barrel for philological whales to play in”.⁶¹ Against the diverse, scientific or ideologically orient-

55 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 2, p. 423.

56 On the background in this history of ideas see Klein's study *Am Anfang war das Wort*.

57 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 2, p. 431.

58 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 2, p. 588.

59 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 2, p. 589.

60 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 2, p. 594.

61 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 2, p. 597.

ed hypotheses about ancestry, Mauthner emphasizes his hypothesis of the origination of languages in social interaction: “An experiment that repeated every day proves that the learning, thus the use of a language does not depend on the ancestry of a human being but on the environment in which they are brought up.” According to this assumption a Chinese person born in England would learn and speak English – just like others born in England. In relation to his thesis, Mauthner refers to a great and unique experiment in human cultural history: “The comprehensive attempt has been made with the history of the Jews. They speak, according to the country of their birth, all the languages on earth.”⁶²

His conclusion is that given the fact that peoples consist of individuals, neither the individual languages nor the languages of a people can prove anything about hereditary. On the contrary, what becomes obvious here is a fundamental variability on the grounds of the human capacity to learn any language in the world. However, anthropology and linguistics make rigid demands for the purity of race and language, so as to avoid the discourse of ‘mixed-people’ and of ‘mixed language’, disregarding the fact that language always originates where people live and speak with one another.⁶³

Mauthner’s radical individualism is thus formed as the counterweight to theological and (racial) biological and historical-linguistic positions that are all too ready to sacrifice the human individual to the respectively changing conceptions of unity (faith, nature, people, language of the people).

6.3 History of Language and Reason

Mauthner begins his considerations on intellectual history with the question of whether it is still plausible to speak of the origin of reason. His provisional answer states that we should no longer speak of the origin of a collective singular reason. We must not only contest the collective singular of “reason” but also destroy the substantive character of reason. “The meta-linguistics of the bold Lazarus Geiger and his student Noiré, himself beholden to word superstition, ventured thus far; Steinthal had carried out a very petty critique of both.”⁶⁴

⁶² Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 2, pp. 609 – 610; and he adds on p. 610: “Growing up [*Wächst... auf* – tense?] a [Jewish child] in a completely German environment, the real language had nothing Jewish in itself. Whereas an Aryan child learns the fiddle [*mauschehn*] when he grows up among Galician Jews.”

⁶³ Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 2, p. 654.

⁶⁴ Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 2, p. 657.

Mauthner relies primarily on the linguist Lazarus Geiger whose treatise *The Origin and Development of Human Language and Reason* [*Ursprung und Entwicklung der menschlichen Sprache und Vernunft*] had opened an immense panorama.⁶⁵ Mauthner had been intensively preoccupied with the study of Lazarus Geiger. He here signals, as it were, a proximity and distance between the two basic positions. He sees agreement at the point where a tension between thinking and speaking, on the basis of their identity and difference, is recognized (thinking is internal speaking although linguistic expression is to be distinguished from the inner form of language). The difference lies in Geiger's reverent attitude towards human thinking. As Mauthner emphasizes, Geiger believes in reason. His belief in reason persuades him into allowing reason to emerge as the highest potentiality of language. Mauthner, however, advances against human thinking "with scornful laughter". He recognizes only "a barren, forever tautological chatter" in linguistic logic, he regards "language as completely worthless for the task of knowledge of the world".⁶⁶

His mistrust of actuality drives Mauthner to radical consequences. He thinks that the task of writing a history of human reason is untenable because with language we do not have a reliable tool at our disposal. There thus remains only that which we commonly call reason and have falsely construed as a "sum of acts of thinking". These, however, are processes that we can describe physiologically. Then we are left with the remnants of a once kingly faculty of reason. "We become convinced that thinking and speaking are identical. A history of reason would thus be identical with a history of language, a history of language would constitute a key part in the ideal history of the brain."⁶⁷

In writing this, Mauthner makes reference to an aspect of the materialism debate in the 19th century, namely the question concerning the localization of mental processes in the human brain.⁶⁸ In his view a history of the brain (analogous to the history of the steam engine) can prospectively advance our research although today we "scarcely [know] anything of the machinery of the modern brain and as good as nothing about the history of its machinery".⁶⁹ Mauthner does not think, as does crude materialism, that the physiology of the brain can provide an explanation of thinking. But he does think that in the near future

65 See Chapter 2 above.

66 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 2, p. 662.

67 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 2, p. 672.

68 On the scientific historical background, see Bayertz, Gerhard and Jaeschke (eds.), *Weltanschauung, Philosophie und Naturwissenschaft im 19. Jahrhundert*, Vol. 1: *Der Materialismus-Streit*, and Hagner, *Homo cerebrialis – Der Wandel vom Seelenorgan zum Gehirn*.

69 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 2, p. 690.

others would deepen Kant's insight into the structure of experience and thinking and thereby correct the error of a construction of *a priori* thinking, which latter that should not be necessary for any experience. The goal of correcting Kant's theory of experience is to be provided in the form of a "psychological explanation of the *a posteriori* and the *a priori*" of experience.⁷⁰

The concept of the *a priori* is relative to the development of human thinking for Mauthner.⁷¹ The *a priori* in thinking means only the larger mass of inherited and acquired experiences at the time, the sum of human systems, the inherited disposition to the assuming of a content of consciousness. So, for example, the disposition to space, time, causality is innate, thus they can be called *a priori*. Accordingly, there remains the enigma of how the concept of causality can originate in experience, when it must already be already added in thought to the simplest experience as a condition. According to Mauthner, the *a priori*, i.e. That which is inherited in a developmental-historical sense, can be "traced back to the unconscious memory in the organized world or of life".⁷² However, that is only a vague indication, really an assembly of word-monsters, which Mauthner wants to avoid [*wie Mauthner sie doch vermeiden will?*]. His notion that the opposition of experience and *a priori* presuppositions of experience is to be approximately understood as the opposition between an acquired orientation in the world and an inherited disposition to orientation which is more concise.

At any rate, the consequence is clear. Mauthner leads logic back to language, this back to psychic structures and this again back to processes that are to be described physiologically. Thus he can maintain that we will comprehend the origination of reason to the extent that we explore the development of the brain and the origination of memories. And standing on this fundament we will, he continues, someday understand how "intellectual life of human beings had developed through inheritance".⁷³ Then the enigma of being human will also be resolved. Mauthner gives no prognoses as to just when that will be the

70 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 2, pp. 699–700: "He [Kant] had not yet recognized that experience and thinking, both, are only memory or language, that is viewed one time from in advance, the other from behind; and he, Kant, didn't yet guess, he who had nevertheless first taught the development of the planetary system, that, a little less than a hundred years after the appearance of his theory of the heavens, the way would be pointed to a new theory of thinking, to a developmental theory of organisms, to a psychological explanation of the *a posteriori* and *a priori*." On Mauthner's understanding of science, see Arens, *Functionalism and Fin de siècle – Fritz Mauthner's Critique of Language*.

71 See Mauthner, "apriori", in his *Wörterbuch der Philosophie, – Neue Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, Vol. 1, pp. 37–41.

72 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 2, pp. 706–707.

73 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 2, p. 711.

case and distinguishes himself from other far simpler attempts at a naturalization of the human spirit.⁷⁴

Thinking is speaking, that is my final opinion [...]. It is not sufficient, if something like the following is said: philosophy is only possible in language, is only possible from language; in human language, from human language. Philosophy is the limit of language itself [*die Grenz der Sprache selbst*], the limit concept, the limit: critique is of language, of human language.⁷⁵

This citation can illustrate in exemplary fashion the difficulties that a thoroughly well-intentioned reader can have with Mauthner's text. No thesis is developed here, not a line of argumentation is constructed. It is claimed that thinking is to be traced back to the process of speaking, thus that all that is in thinking occurs in language. A standpoint is necessary for this claim that allows a critical reflection on the event of language. This standpoint cannot, on Mauthner's view, lie beyond language because there is no such a beyond. The Archimedian point of linguistic critique is thus merely a limit-concept of language, a part of the event of language itself. What is meant is a limit point at which speaking turns over to silence or at which the linguistic mediation of the I and actuality is broken up in a pure deed. These are the consequences that Mauthner hints at in the passage of text cited.⁷⁶

It is thus the task of linguistic critique to break up the connection between language and actuality so as to set the human individual in the role of making such distinctions. The distinctions that need to be made must be discovered by every individual for themselves. The critique of language only leads them up to this point. "It is one of the most important points of linguistic critique that we recognize the connection or rather the lack of connection between the actual world and phonetic sounds."⁷⁷ We recognize that every word, every concept of

74 See the current debate in Pauen and Roth (eds.), *Neurowissenschaften und Philosophie*. And the explanation of the background to this debate in Pauen, *Was ist der Mensch?*

75 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 3: *Zur Grammatik und Logik*, 3rd edition, Foreword to the 2nd edition, p. X..

76 See Mauthner, "Mysticism", in: *Wörterbuch der Philosophie – Neue Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, Vol. 2, pp. 115–134; especially p. 132: "For ten years I have taught: the I-feeling is an illusion, the unity of the individual is an illusion. If I am [*bin*] not *I*, but nevertheless am [*bin*], then I may well also believe of all other beings: they are only apparently individuals, they are not distinct from me, I am one with them, they and I *within* [*innen*] one. Is this mere succession of philosophical words? A language game? No. What I can experience, is no longer mere language. What I can experience, that is actual [*wirklich*]."

77 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 3, p. 223.

our language is only a hypothesis.⁷⁸ To arrive at this insight, the theological fundament of the understanding of language must be removed. Mauthner appeals to a materialistic critique of religious and idealistic world picture in the 19th century although he sees the stupefying tendency of a simple materialist world picture.⁷⁹ For him Büchner and Haekel are like “cannon fodder” in the struggle against the dogma whose theological roots seem obvious: the dogma that language has an actuality content. The resistance of the dogma ensures that today too the philosophers grapple with dead Aristotelian concepts. They torment themselves with phantom pains that are produced by the remembrance of a long since “amputated past”.

Much more valuable for us are of course the ideas of the naturalists who come to an attempt at an explanation of nature after a sure description of nature. Not Schelling and Hegel, not Trendelenburg and Schopenhauer or even the thinking poet Nietzsche should be named the philosophers of the 19th century and be compared to Plato and Kant but men such as Darwin, who at least created the last abstraction from the vocabulary of his present.⁸⁰

So as to provide an example of the longevity of linguistic abstractions, Mauthner provides an excursus on the concept of necessity that has become a basic concept of natural science and the humanities since the 17th century. In overview, the pride of modern science in its achievement is shown in having removed the notions of goal and chance from the observation of nature. But Mauthner recognizes here a further mistaken belief, as Friedrich Albert Lange had done before.

There is no cruder self-deception. We see in a hundred cases of our investigation that goal or purpose, or teleology as expressed in scholarly fashion, has, after the retirement of a personal God, been everywhere secretly subscribed to the new small divinities or natural laws.

78 See Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 3, pp. 488–489.

79 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 3, p. 547: “Materialism has the great merit of having broken down the walls of theology. This involves a thick skull [...]” And he adds on p. 550: “Just as one calls antisemitism a socialism for idiots, so materialism called is philosophy for idiots.” Compare Mauthner’s “Brief an Landauer (17.05.1902)” in: Delf and Schöps (eds.), *Gustav Landauer – Fritz Mauthner. Briefwechsel 1890–1919*, p. 67 on “a dirty materialistic eggshell” of the book manuscript of the *Beiträge* that he must gradually remove. Here we can recognize one of Mauthner’s motives, namely the overstretching of a crude materialism of biological descent into the racial theories of his time.

80 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 3, p. 552.

[The belief in a goal beyond the world] can never ever be removed from human thinking because it cannot be removed from impoverished human language.⁸¹

The resistance of the teleological principle in language cannot be destroyed through a counter-conception – “All actuality is contingent!”⁸² Yet Darwin’s “ingenious hypothesis” of the purposiveness of the organism through adaptation and inheritance has not ensured a general enlightenment. Instead of this reactionary powers reintroduce the concept of purpose in the analysis of social processes and in the observation of nature. Mauthner argues that if we are absolutely seriously in bidding farewell to the representation of personal God and of world ordering creative power and then the sublimated concept of purpose in Darwinism is to be abandoned. That means that in the analysis of the concept of development we are excising all connotations of progress through the critique of language.⁸³ We must see that purposiveness and order are absent in actuality. We must separate our wish for order from the analysis of actuality. “We cannot grasp actuality with these human words [i.e. order]. The human being had brought order into nature through its impoverished language. He subsequently despairs, when we cannot find his order in nature.”⁸⁴

6.4 The Actuality of Language

But what then is actuality if not an ordered system? And what constitutes the actuality of language? Or, on Mauthner’s view, is there no linguistic actuality be-

81 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 3, p. 575. Compare Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus und Kritik seiner Bedeutung in der Gegenwart*, Vol. 2.: *Geschichte des Materialismus seit Kant*, S. 240 – 284: “Darwinismus und Teleologie”. And Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, first part, aphorism 14, p. 28. English translation: *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 15 – 16: “Now it is beginning to dawn on maybe five or six brains that physics too is only an interpretation and arrangement of the world (according to ourselves! If I may say so) and *not* an explanation of the world [...]. There was a type of *enjoyment* in overpowering and interpreting the world in the manner of Plato, different from the enjoyment offered by today’s physicists, or by the Darwinians and the anti-teleologists who work in physiology, with their principle of the ‘smallest possible force’ and the greatest possible stupidity.”

82 See Mauthner, “Richtung”, in: *Wörterbuch der Philosophie – Neue Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, Vol. 2, pp. 329 – 332.

83 See Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 3, p. 586. On the debate on teleological thought in the late 19th century see Hartung, “Darwin und die Philosophen. Eine Studie zur Darwin-Rezeption im 19. Jahrhundert”.

84 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 3, p. 590.

hind the illusions of linguistics forms? If this is indeed the case, then the path to despair that his radical linguistic scepticism points towards would in fact be inevitable.

Mauthner gives an answer to these questions which suggests a way out. He recognizes only one factual instance of actuality: the individual. Only individuals are real however these too cannot be discovered outside our language and our memories. According to Mauthner, we can only make two statements about human beings, concerning their objectivity and generality as well as their subjectivity and individuality. Objectively seen human beings are to be considered in their generality as completed organisms; in this regard they are the object of the natural sciences. Subjectively seen, human beings are "incomplete individual memories" and as such the object of psychological analysis and continual linguistic-critical reflection. In both domains a virulent word realism is to be combatted by all available means.⁸⁵ That requires a sceptical position of the most extreme kind and the readiness to disentangle oneself in the struggle with one's self from the "tyranny of language".⁸⁶ Mauthner declares linguistic critique to be the most important task for humanity. The possibility of further development depends on the annihilation of rigid language. If critique fails to materialize humanity will prove to be unfit for the future.

The business of linguistic critique thus sets as a first step that its object be critically examined. Language is to be distinguished from languages and the act of speaking. In Mauthner's metaphorical language, languages resemble rivers that never stand still and constantly change their form. As compared to the relative consistency of languages, he characterises Language as a "stream of air" which the "ungraspable and fleeing individual moments" of speaking bring to expression.⁸⁷ And language is nothing other than these moments that cannot be translated into a mere sum of relations. The quality of experience and the will to communicate is contained in each individual moment: that is the essential feature of language. Only as social factor is it something actual. "It is a social

⁸⁵ Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 3, S. 611: "The modern realism has seen into the unreality of the concepts of genus and species, but remains however, insofar as it has not become the critique of language – within the conception [*Auffassung*] of the last word-realism concerning actuality [*Wirklichen Wortrealismus?*]."

⁸⁶ Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 1: *Zur Sprache und zur Psychologie*, p. 1.

⁸⁷ Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 2, p. 9. Compare Mauthners long article "Veränderung" in *Wörterbuch der Philosophie – Neue Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, Vol. 2, pp. 512–526.

actuality; apart from this, it is only an abstraction of specific movements. [...] There are no two human beings that speak the same language.”⁸⁸

Mauthner raises the question of where the abstraction of language is actual and becomes a real force for us human beings. His answer is: language is in the air, it is also in people, it is a real power only between human beings. Language is the “between” of social interaction. It is the air-like material of any human community. For language, like everything that is ‘in the air’, it is impossible to specify a determinate point in space and time. It also cannot be occupied, fully, neither by the rulers nor by the conquered, neither by so called “fellow countrymen” nor by other groups. Language is neither a product of nature or a work of art. Language is made by all human beings who participate in a linguistic community. It originates for the small needs of fellow human beings. “Language has become a great city. [...] Language is held in common. All belongs to all, all bathe in it, all drink of it, and all exude it.”⁸⁹

Language is living. However, its being alive must not be misconstrued. As Mauthner emphasizes, language is not an “organism”. The metaphor of organism was much abused in the philosophy of language because it suggests that language is a reality that does not need human involvement.⁹⁰ In Mauthner’s view language is not a unity, it does not exist for itself alone but only between human beings. Individuals and communities come together in language; more precisely, they only arise in their reciprocal relatedness. The smallest part of language is untranslatable, incomprehensible, “incommunicable” and remains tied to the brains of individuals. The greater and more important part of language flickers between individual brains when they come into contact and it lives between human beings. Thus regarded, language is a social power that first opens the space of the social and reacts on the thoughts of individuals, on the solitary brain. If we now maintain that language is a social power, then it in turn seems to have an actual character in itself. Mauthner warns his reader against reviving the “old ghost of teleology” in linguistic philosophy by transfiguring language into a power of history (Hegel) and to a form of objective spirit (Hegel and Steintal). We must insist, against all suggestions of this kind, that a general purpose is not realized in the event of language.⁹¹ Mauthner proclaims a radical individu-

⁸⁸ Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 1, p. 18. See also Mauthner, “Situation and Language”, especially p. 276: “An actual commonality in the picture of the world between two people is never available. Never can two people completely understand one another.”

⁸⁹ Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 1, p. 27.

⁹⁰ See Chapter 1 above.

⁹¹ See Mauthner, “Zufall und Zweck”, in *Wörterbuch der Philosophie – Neue Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, Vol 2, pp. 629 – 647. See also Hartung, “Von einer Misshandlung des Zweckbe-

alism as a means against all attempts to usurp him or her in language: "In the end only the individual is real and only what benefits the individual is beneficial."⁹²

If language is, at most, something actual as individual language, Mauthner further questions whether it is legitimate to say that the individual human receives the experience of centuries with language. He refers implicitly here to Moritz Lazarus's analysis. This latter had, in his monograph on *The Life of the Soul* [*Das Leben der Seele*], brought together Herbartian psychology and Humboldtian analysis of the development of language. Under the heading of the psychical processes of a "condensation of thinking", Lazarus describes a learning process that is to be understood as equally individual-psychological as well as cultural-theoretical.⁹³ For Mauthner too language in this sense is of great advantage in communicating inherited knowledge [*ererbtes Wissen*] and for inheritance [*Vererbung*] itself (for memory). There are further such "shortcuts" as the learning of walking upright, the acquisition of cultural techniques (making fire, cooking and so on).

However, as against Lazarus and other theoreticians of objective spirit, Mauthner draws a strict boundary between the individual and society. "However, all the world errs when it believes that the child acquires the experience of the people, its knowledge and its cultural together with the language of the people."⁹⁴ He does not see a successful mediation between individual needs of human beings, on one hand, and the general requirements of society, on the other. He vehemently rejects the notion that an idea, a value and a worldview are also transferred with the word. As against the hypothesis of an identity between language and spirit that Steinthal had already denounced as mysticism,⁹⁵

griffs. F.A. Trendelenburgs Kritik der praktischen Philosophie Herbarts und eine Anmerkung zur Lehre Darwins".

⁹² Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 1, p. 70.

⁹³ See Lazarus, *Geist und Sprache, eine psychologische Monographie*, pp. 238–240: "Every spiritual process too has, as the introduction teaches, a certain duration and requires a determinate expenditure of force and energy. Fast and playfully we repeat the habitual content of thought that is familiar; we grasp the new slowly and with effort; thinking of the simple occurs easily, the composite and evocative with difficulty and slowly. The condensation [*Verdichtung*]* of thinking only consists in our grasping the same content in a shorter time and with less exertion of force." See Chapter 3, above.

⁹⁴ Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 1, p. 72.

⁹⁵ See Humboldt, *Ueber das vergleichende Sprachstudium in Beziehung auf die verschiedenen Epochen der Sprachentwicklung in Akademieschriften*, Vol. 7: *Historisch-Philosophische Klasse*, 1820–1821, pp. 240–241. He writes the following on the 'essence [*Wesen*]' of language: "The immediate exhalation of an organic being [*Wesens*] in its sensible and intellectual significance

he insists that language is not a 'Nuremberg Funnel', i.e. a mechanical way of learning.

Only the work of the spirit over an infinitely long time can become thoroughly abbreviated for the child, by the fact that in its earliest time it receives through communication the web of language, in a sense. Whatever it may do with it thereafter is another matter. An abbreviation of the infinitely long development of language takes place, nothing more. The child learns to speak, but it does not learn the language.⁹⁶

Mauthner's scepticism about actuality and language remains, in linguistic-philosophical regard, at the level of a pre-structuralist theory formation. Although he knows of the opposition between language and speech that is later put in the formulation of "Langue et Parole" by Ferdinand de Saussure (his *Cours de linguistique générale* was first published in 1916) and that is influential up to today, but Mauthner negates the social aspect of speech (parole). The reason for this lies in a pre-theoretical commitment to a radical scepticism together with a fundamentally sceptical tone which Mauthner does not make explicit.

In his polemic against the Aristotelian theory of the categories already discussed in detail above, he refuses the idea of a universal grammar as well as that of the epistemological categories of space, time, causality and so on. "It would be very unphilosophical to belief in the objectivity of this alphabet", for all categories are of human origin.⁹⁷ The idea that elementary forms of human thinking can be discovered by anthropological researches (see Émile Durkheim) leads to another determination of objectivity that nonetheless is provided with a universal claim to validity. Although Mauthner rejects this notion in principle, he also follows his phenomenal sense of discovery and indicates connections that at least partially contradict his theoretical programme. Thus he makes the human interest responsible, for it lays the "seed for all development of the categories".⁹⁸ Thus he counts language too among the "inventions of the human organism" and legitimates our adherence to the categorical meaning of language by recourse to the development of the human organism. In his view, it was by chance that particular senses were formed in particular living beings in the course of development or evolution; but at the level of human beings, it

[*Geltung*], in this it shares the nature of all organic life: each can only exist through the other, and everything [*Alles*] can only exist through the one power that pervades the entirety [*das Ganze*]." See Steinthal on this, "Der heutige Zustand der Sprachwissenschaft (Erster Artikel)", pp. 135–137 and his *Charakteristik der Hauptsächlichsten Typen des Sprachbaues*, pp. 23–27.

⁹⁶ Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 1, p. 73.

⁹⁷ Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 1, p. 76.

⁹⁸ See Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 1, pp. 78–80.

is no longer contingent that we understand the world as we see it – that is, that the categories of our language are dependent on our senses.

On the one hand, the prevailing notion in Mauthner's work is that our human organization is merely the product of contingent development. In a paraphrase of Nietzsche's doctrine, the notion of blind development teaches "the last resignation, the silencing of the question concerning good and evil, concerning benefits and harm". On the other hand, language is the medium for self-elevation of human beings over the blind course of things. Language "becomes the memory of the organism called human and this organism itself is also only the memory of its own development. Life and language coincide in an irresolvable unity."⁹⁹ If this is so, then the question that is posed by linguistic critique in the carrying out of its destructive business arises once again. It is a question that it cannot avoid: Was life brought to language in the language purified by linguistic critique?

Mauthner's critique of language leads to polemical points under which the gains of his work largely faded. He lets himself become carried away with substantivizing language itself and raising it to being the active subject of history although it is precisely this that, according to his theory, is a severe transgression. Thus for him language has "insolently betrayed" us. It is the scourge of humanity. It has driven us out of paradise, and so on. In parts, scientific analysis and parody can be scarcely distinguished. For example, Mauthner muses about what would have happened if we had passed language on to the apes. Then these too must, he further reflects, bear the burden of language "and we alone would not be sick, poisoned in the enormous, speechless, healing world".¹⁰⁰ On a charitable reading, these thoughts are due to his ambivalent attitude to the world that is committed to humour and resignation in equal measure. These reflections are illuminating only when Mauthner fathoms the depths of a philosophical pessimism in Arthur Schopenhauer and Eduard von Hartmann and ascertains that "all minds of the first rank [have seen through ...] the horror of life". But how are world weariness and profound cheer possible at the same time?

The enigma lightens a little when one considers that whoever endeavours to know the world in its deepest senses, also best sees through the fraud of language. And, naturally, every glance behind the veil of life fills us with the most formidable horror before the

⁹⁹ Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 1, p. 81.

¹⁰⁰ Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 1, p. 87.

beast in us. This recognition itself can be resolved and come to good cheer when we realize that it is nothing other than language, a breath of the winds of remembrance.¹⁰¹

It is thus the entrancement of the individual in the present that occurs in language. We can free only ourselves from its grasp by “virtuosity of thinking”. Thus regarded, pessimism is for Mauthner the result of an illusion of omnipresence. But in fact everything passes away and the possibility of liberation from the present, especially that which is fixed in linguistic expression, is given with every moment of life. Only the present life hurts; in its most extreme moments we sink into the present and lose language. In contrast to this, the insight that all knowledge and thinking only occur in language liberates us. Cheerfulness is the result of a profound understanding of the constantly developing, temporary, advancing and transitory life. On this point Mauthner is close to Friedrich Nietzsche, whose religious-critical impulse appears to be arrived at in his version of scepticism regarding actuality and language. More than suppositions, however, cannot really be permitted here.¹⁰²

In Mauthner’s linguistic-critical summary, the lines of thought concerning linguistic, religious and cultural critique converge at one point.

Summarizing briefly: Language does not exist, the individual language too is not actual; words never testify to knowledge, they are only a tool of poetry, they do not provide any real intuition and are not real. Nevertheless, they can be powerful. Devastating as a hurricane, which is a puff of air just like the word. The word can easily become stronger than a deed, however, the word never fosters life.¹⁰³

In his *Self-Portrait [Selbstdarstellung]* (1922) Mauthner emphasized the proximity of the critique of language and religion. In Christianity especially he recognizes the basis of a “substantive world” which assumes there is an object behind every word and an entire world behind the word “God”.¹⁰⁴ A further example is word fetishism of Judaism which is mainly expressed in their educational techniques. For Mauthner, these examples serve “as indications that there is a concealed the-

101 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 2, pp. 88–89.

102 The correspondence with Landauer gives some indications that Nietzsche’s writings were read and discussed at length. On this and more [*Darüber hinaus*] see Gustafsson, *Sprache und Lüge*; Thalken, *Ein bewegliches Heer von Metaphern*.

103 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 1, p. 151.

104 Mauthner, “Fritz Mauthner”, pp. 138–140; his “Christentum” in *Wörterbuch der Philosophie – Neue Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, Vol. 1, pp. 116–156; his “Substantivische Welt” in *Wörterbuch der Philosophie – Neue Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, Vol. 2, pp. 464–468.

ology in all our thinking and speaking, that words are mere gods".¹⁰⁵ Following the lead of Spinoza's critique of religion, he urges us to expose ourselves indifferently to the deaf and dumb necessity of the processes of life so as to overcome this attitude of religious word fetishism. Although on his view religion is the ideology of an earlier time and is no longer the language of the present, Mauthner maintains that the business of the critique of religion will only be complete when it is realized as critique of language. All the words of our language must be freed from the religious sense of prehistory.¹⁰⁶ Yet even on this point Mauthner is ambiguous. On one hand he is of the firm conviction that the old gods must be driven from the language of the present (and the presentiment of the necessity of this step was predominant at that time); on the other, however, he has doubts as to the success of this operation, for he asks himself whether "any science [is] free from theology? From mythology? A science whose sole means is anthropomorphic language?".¹⁰⁷

6.5 Suicide through the Critique of Language – A Crossing of the Boundary

Thus how does the critique of language look as critique of science when it cuts off its religious and anthropomorphic roots? Mauthner's answer reads: "The critique of language is suicidal" because the point of departure for the critique lies in reason, i. e., in language, and it must be directed against itself.¹⁰⁸ In the face of this precarious position there remains, in his view, only the possibility of building a slender bridge between thinking and actuality by means of language. We can speak of a constructive aspect of the praxis of the critique of language. Mauthner sees bridges of this kind in which we are in an immediate experiential context and the word for the thought must be sought and formed. That is always the case when we discover something in the everyday world or in the sciences.

In applying Herbart's theory of apperception to social praxis, Mauthner indicates the particular moments "when a fortunate finder or inventor enriches

105 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 1, p. 173.

106 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 1, p. 173: "We live in a language, that rests on [*aufrucht*] the language of earlier times. For there is never a word in the new language or ideology which does not have a conservative, an antiquated, a religious meaning [*Sinn*]."

107 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 2, p. 718.

108 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 1, p. 177. And p. 178: "The critique of language is more questionable [*bedenklicher*] than any other scientific discipline. The tool, language, becomes indignant, wants to have a say."

the inherited and acquired experience in concepts through an *Aperçu*".¹⁰⁹ When this happens the old stock of experience is enriched through new impressions or discoveries and an alien moment breaks into our thinking. As is well known, in travelling we experience a broadening of horizons (in the foreign, through foreign languages) because our image of actuality is enriched. This process is deeply ambivalent, for in Mauthner's view even language, thinking, ideologies and images of actuality are "unactual". In contrast, only "the momentary movement of the organ of language and properly only the last microscopic component of this movement [are] actual [...]; only the momentary reminiscence, the momentary act of memory is actual".¹¹⁰

Actuality constitutes itself accordingly only as an impulse to movement on the respective level of its articulation, as physical moment, as psychological impulse and as "expressive movement",¹¹¹ in the same way as linguistic expression, gesture and any social interaction. "Why should our thinking be more than a dying away of the movements in the universe".¹¹² As the absence of a question mark shows, this is not a question for Mauthner but rather a statement.

The critique of language, in the form of a radical critique of science, leads to a restriction of knowledge of actuality. All that is recognizable of actuality are sketchy lines of movement which themselves can only be traced back to (objective) events and to (subjective) experience respectively. All generalization from experience, [be it] in the form of chains of occurrences and the subsumption of individual experiential data, leads away from actuality, according to Mauthner. This illusory relationship is constituted in a fatal way in every speech act. The disguising of the events in the speech act is always already carried out and carried out always anew because of the connectedness of grammatical and psychological structures. The critique of language is thus a necessary and interminable statement of accounts regarding futile efforts at knowledge and its *apor-*

109 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 1, p. 195. And he adds: "Then however our knowledge of actuality becomes enriched at first; the recollection of it [*Erinnerung daran*] enriches thinking and speaking with one blow." See Mauthner, "Apperzeption" in *Wörterbuch der Philosophie – Neue Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, Vol. 1, pp. 28–37.

110 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 1, p. 201. See Weiler, *Mauthner's Critique of Language*, pp. 277–288; especially p. 278: "Mauthner interprets the term *Weltanschauung* in individualistic terms. If each person has an individual language which offers to some degree from that of others then each person's *Weltanschauung* must also be different to a certain degree. [...] we could say, for Mauthner, a *Weltanschauung* is the sum-total of the characteristic modes of thinking, speaking and of acting of an individual and, to the extent to which individuals are discernibly similar in these respects, of a group."

111 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 1, p. 223.

112 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 1, p. 232.

iai. What it reveals is a sorry description of the many attempts to acquire knowledge, of the mere “to and fro between wild despair and the happiness of quiet illusion”.¹¹³

Mauthner stops at the point of uncovering the general human situation that results from the ambivalence of the use of language. Actuality is discovered and covered up in the event of language. He only provides hints as to how we should deal with the situation. Thus he speaks of the possibility of a liberation from the illusion-machine language through a radical renunciation of self-deception. The redemptive deed is tantamount to an attitude of self-abandonment – “if critique could be practiced with the quiet, despairing suicide of thinking or speaking”.¹¹⁴

That is the final word of Mauthner’s critique of language, suicide in speaking and the demand for self-dissolution. Yet even this final word is ambivalent because it oscillates *in extremis* between despair and happiness, between activity and passivity. When Mauthner complied with Martin Buber’s wish for his authoring a short essay on *Language* [*Die Sprache*] for the series of writings *Society* [*Die Gesellschaft*], he gave a trenchant summary of his views.¹¹⁵ His programme for the critique of language had especially effective in an abridgement in which the destructive fervour of his main work was mitigated.¹¹⁶

There are general scientific-theoretical and cultural critical discussions at the beginning of this short essay. On Mauthner’s perspective, our time is characterized by the fact that the sciences are deprived of their objects of research. Psychology must renounce the psyche just as social psychology [*Völkerpsychologie*] cannot reckon with a social psyche [*Völkerpsyche*]. The greatness of the linguistic and social psychologists Steinthal and Lazarus lies in their surveying this loss, whereas most of their contemporaries simply ignored it. On Mauthner’s portrayal Steinthal especially, under the influence of the keen and sensitive Herbart, is tormented by the insight “that between human beings (because he cannot see any substance) is only the spirit of the people, further a mere activity”.¹¹⁷ With this, linguistics also loses its thematic object or at any rate loses the illusion that it, in its analysis of linguistic processes, would encounter a substance named “language”.

The ambivalence of the process and the processual tool language is especially manifest with respect to its by-product, religion.

113 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 1, p. 641.

114 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 1, p. 641.

115 See Mauthner, *Die Sprache*.

116 See for example the reading references in Walter Benjamin, *Briefe*, Vol. 1., p. 28.

117 Mauthner, *Die Sprache*, p. 12.

For religion, insofar as it is language, language is just right, both fit together. In science language betrays its powerlessness; in poetry it shows the power of its beauty; in religion the power of language tyrannizes us in its most debased form as the power of the dead word, the word of the dead [*des toten Wortes, des Totenwortes*].¹¹⁸

A structural characteristic of language is the preserving power of cultural values that need not succumb to the general process of becoming and passing away. The example of religion proves that words remain behind in language even though the living social praxis that was once associated with them is long since dead. A theological conceptuality dominates in our morality and in the sciences (to name only two areas) without its having been generally noticed.

A longer analytic section follows these remarks on the critique of science and culture. Departing from physiological considerations (language and the brain) he goes on to linguistics and psychology (thinking and speaking) in order, by way of conclusion, to recognize the actuality of language in processual events. It is here that the impressive metaphor of the “language life”¹¹⁹ can be found by means of which Mauthner is brought to the point about the ambivalence of the human capacity for language. To Mauthner, there is no life outside of language, but language is also the medium of turning away from the moments of life which are only ever experienced individually.

The thought that language is a processual event brings with it a great many consequences for linguistics and social theory. On the supposition that language is not a substance, then the language of peoples too are only processual moments. Thus any attempt at a definition of the unities of people which takes the history of language as a guideline remains suspended in the air.¹²⁰ Mauthner persists in his assumption that the language of a people “is only a process” between members of a community of people [*Volksgemeinschaft*], that is, “an infinitely complicated activity, not a tangible, material organism”.¹²¹ He vehemently turns against the conception that a people is a group of human beings united through a common descent, language and custom as well as against the legends of the psychology of descent which he sees as linked to the so-called “racial prejudice”.¹²²

118 Mauthner, *Die Sprache*, p. 19 and p. 20: “Religion is antiquated knowledge whose words have remained.”

119 Mauthner, *Die Sprache*, p. 28.

120 See Chapter 1 above.

121 Mauthner, *Die Sprache*, pp. 30–31.

122 Mauthner, *Die Sprache*, p. 46–47. Whereby [*Wobei*] he also emphasizes the unifying [*eini-genden*] character of language for human beings. This is a fact that is of great social and cultural-historical importance in Germany especially, even if it should not be overstretched. See p. 48:

Mauthner remains true to his radical individualism. Language is an occurrence that is individual at its core, even though it happens between individuals. Thus, from the standpoint of everyday life all the way to that of scientific work, it is a matter of bringing about an “inconspicuous activity of translation” between individual and society, between occurrence and structure, between individual experience and a common situation of the soul [*Seelensituation*]. This task is necessary but interminable. The spiritual situation of the soul of an individual, a people and of humanity in its entirety are incomprehensible to one another and withdraw from mediation. Their uniqueness is reflected respectively in their vocabulary; their discrepancy leads to accepting [*der Annahme von*] an “impossibility of translation”.¹²³

Mauthner neither maintains anything like the fact of a language of the people nor the utopia of a universal language. What remains and what really counts is only individual speech. Only in the processual event of language, in “language life [*Sprachleben*]” can temporary unities be fixed: the individual I as well as the people. These however have an illusionary character.¹²⁴ “I” is the individual speaking and “a people is only that which speaks a common language”.¹²⁵ For Mauthner, outside of this event, apart from social interaction, there is [*ist*] no human actuality.

Against the background of this intensification of his linguistic-critical thesis, Mauthner portrays himself as the successor of the great critical spirits Max Stirner and Friedrich Nietzsche. He professes his task to be that of seeing through the “snake-like deception of language” and speaks of the business of the critique of language as his “life’s work”.¹²⁶ Hints and taking polemical positions also predominate in his short essay *Language* [*Die Sprache*]. Within this piece is a portrait of the linguistic Steinthal, which turns out to be a secret self-portrait. At one point he concedes that Steinthal has an “extraordinary talent [...], more eristic

“Up to the year 1870 the German people could not be understood otherwise than as the crowd with the common German language.”

123 Mauthner, *Die Sprache*, p. 54. Compare Benjamin, “Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers”.

124 See Mauthner, “Individualism” in *Wörterbuch der Philosophie – Neue Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, Vol. 1, p. 552: “The I-feeling is an illusion but not a lie. I have [expressed] this thought often enough [...] the concepts of duration, unity, form and memory [*Gedächtnis*] are brought into relation with the I-feeling and such that the I praised by Avernarius, Mach und Ziehen is sought to be lead back again to psychology from out of metaphysics, where it is actually unsalvageable [*unrettbar*]. Where it is, among other illusions, ineradicable as in language [*Wo es neben anderen Täuschungen unvertilgbar ist wie in der Sprache?*]”

125 Mauthner, *Die Sprache*, p. 78; and p. 85: “Language is unconscious, unwritten folk psychology.”

126 Mauthner, *Die Sprache*, p. 90.

type [...] (impolite, but entirely objective: Talmudic type), [because of this] usually detected a thought in opposition to the proposition of an another”.¹²⁷ Leaving the stereotype of the “Talmud type” aside for the moment, in any case the finding remains that among Steinthal’s strengths (and weaknesses) is that he almost invariably sharpens his theses in the form of commentary on the texts of others.¹²⁸ This corresponds almost exactly to Mauthner’s method in the critique of language.

Nevertheless, Mauthner finds points of agreement with his position in both Steinthal and the linguist Hermann Paul, including the indications that language is abstraction and moreover concerning speech as social activity.¹²⁹ Mauthner advocates for a research into language that turns towards language as a structural element of social actuality comparable to an electric tram. In the case of language too the product of “human work” is available, whose equipmental character and material we can investigate.¹³⁰ The material is the air: the equipment is the sound-apparatus and the brain. Overall language is *the* tool of social actuality.¹³¹

Mauthner too must admit to following up on the books of others. He does not succeed in turning from the last illusion, namely that language is the highest social value. Here he is lacking the radicalness with which he had turned from the alleged fact of an individual language and the associated “illusion of equipment for knowledge”. But what was the meaning of all speaking and writing if we bid farewell to this final illusion? Mauthner assesses the price of a final dis-illusionment and toys with such a possibility. “This would be the redeeming deed, if critique could be practised with the quiet and despairing suicide of thinking and speaking, if critique would not have to be exercised with words that only have a semblance of life.”¹³²

127 Mauthner, *Die Sprache*, p. 110.

128 See amongst others the collected studies in Steinthal, *Kleine sprachtheoretische Schriften*.

129 See Paul, *Prinzipien der Sprachgeschichte*, Chapter. 1: “Allgemeines über das Wesen der Sprachentwicklung”, pp. 23–36; especially p. 32: “The real cause for the change of custom is nothing other than the habitual activity of speech.”

130 Mauthner, *Die Sprache*, pp. 114–115; and pp. 118–119: “I will now express it thus: Brain, larynx and so on are actually the tools of the momentary speech act, Paul’s atomized language, language is the tool of human intercourse, Steinthal’s language.”

131 This thesis returns in linguistic and social-theoretical works by Ernst Cassirer, Alfred Schütz and Peter Berger/Thomas Luckmann. On this see Chapter 7 below.

132 Mauthner, *Die Sprache*, p. 120.

6.6 Mauthner’s Concept of the Critique of Language in the Mirror of His Critics

The suicide of speaking amounts to the silence of the mystic. Redemption means that with this step a radical scepticism with regard to language, the mistrust in actuality – and the despair that goes with it – is overcome.¹³³ His friend Gustav Landauer had authored a wonderfully emphatic commentary on this consideration. His study *Scepticism and Mysticism – An Attempt in Connection with Mauthner’s Linguistic Critique* [*Skepsis und Mystik – Versuche im Anschluss an Mauthners Sprachkritik*] (1903) is still the most coherent attempt at interpretation of Mauthner’s critique of language with regard to its consequences for practical life.

Landauer constructs a dialectical tension between a state of illusions (that of the old beliefs), a state of radical scepticism (nihilism as a result of the critique of language) and a new state of action and the word, of an “unbelieved illusion”. In his thoroughly affirmative commentary on the three volumes of the *Critique of Language*, Landauer emphasizes the sceptical and serious aspect of Mauthner which, he thinks, is only half of the picture. “Behind Mauthner’s critique of language the door opens to a new art and to the game of life, that is no longer taken seriously and precisely because of that can devote itself to great struggles, great ventures, unheard of outrages, astonishing beauty.”¹³⁴

In the early years of the 20th century Landauer regards his work as complementary to Mauthner’s. Landauer contributes the missing power of affirmation. The results of the critique of language are his point of departure. Through a change of perspective, a new cheerfulness emerges from Mauthner’s resignation. As Landauer underlines, when we see that we can only fail to capture and comprehend actuality, our conclusion should be a new “state of readiness”:

We experience the world, we let ourselves be captured and comprehended by it [...] Let us be [*Seien wir*] the medium of the world, active and passive in one. Up to now we contented ourselves in changing the world into the human spirit, more precisely: into the spirit of the brain; now we change ourselves into the world spirit.¹³⁵

133 Mauthner, *Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*, Vol. 3, p. 617. See Eschenbacher, *Fritz Mauthner und die deutsche Literatur um 1900*, pp. 94–111, who distinguishes between a passive (silence) and an active (art of speech, political deed) paths; ultimately it is not Mauthner but Landauer, in connection with him, who treads this path.

134 Landauer, *Skepsis und Mystik*, pp. 6–7.

135 Landauer, *Skepsis und Mystik*, pp. 8–9.

That is the characteristic style of Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach (which Landauer could not have known) in Mauthner's language. With his emphasis on this, Landauer far surpasses Mauthner and provides a counterpoint to Mauthner's resigned silence. The difference in this attitude is evident in several places, including within his call to embody the world spirit, his hymn to polytheism and his miniature on music as the new world language.¹³⁶ As a reader of the *Contributions* he is in proximity to his friend when he examines the business of the critique of language in its implications for a critique of culture and science, and he compares Mauthner's critique of language with Nietzsche's critique of morality. Landauer is thought provoking when he uncovers an anthropological core of the critique of language. In his view, Lessing's motto "For Human Beings" should stand over everything that Mauthner writes because Mauthner in no way denies that our thinking, our memory and our language are human. He only denies, tragically denies, that it brings us beyond the merely-human, that it leads us to nature, to the macro-cosmos.¹³⁷

At the conclusion of his commentary Landauer takes an interest in the practical value of the critique of language. He sees this as preparation for moving us to a "great mood". His appeal to the reading of Mauthner's work is based on the idea that only reading – as with Nietzsche's texts – can give us something of the sort. Namely, it can raise us to a euphoric mood. To those readers "who feel this within themselves, Mauthner's critique of language has given its best: repose on the far side of despair".¹³⁸ But there is no standing still here, at this point the book must be closed so as to shape reality with epistemological passion and practical courage. Landauer's treatise *Revolution [Die Revolution]* can be read as the continuation of this critique of language.

However, in the years that followed and precisely with regard to the question of how the programme of the critique of language can be social praxis, differences between the friends lead to the temporary breaking off of their friendship. In the time of the First World War Mauthner inclines towards an "instrumentalized critique of language" that articulates itself in the form of "chauvinistic war propaganda".¹³⁹ Mauthner himself speaks of the necessity, in difficult times as a German, to "bear Kleist's mask". Landauer, however, repeatedly expressed his disillusionment about the political views of his friend several times: "We cannot understand each other in matters of what I flatly call unmitigated chauvinism and repugnant retaliation [...] You once said to me that I was, in one regard or

136 Landauer, *Skepsis und Mystik*, pp. 60–62.

137 Landauer, *Skepsis und Mystik*, p. 67.

138 Landauer, *Skepsis und Mystik*, p. 73.

139 See Thalken, *Ein bewegliches Heer von Metaphern*, pp. 273–283.

another, a kind of incentive to courage for you. I wish that I had been more so."¹⁴⁰

Mauthner simply ignores the reference to the previous debate on the critique of language and the possibilities for its social praxis and underscores the opposed position: "The dominant feeling for me is mortal fear for Germany, for you apparently not [...]"¹⁴¹ Laudauer counters and thinks that his friend succumbs to an illusion when he thinks to speak in the place of others: "Maybe you think you write the language of the people. But no, you write the language of the newspapers, the German newspapers; you write the language of abnormal gullibility, very defective observations, wholly unreliable generalizations and the coarsest injustice."¹⁴² It is a great tragedy that Mauthner, the critic of language, is issued such testimony by his friend. Has not the daily business of journalism made it clear that the critique of language failed in his self-prescribed suicide? Laudauer was totally correct in this observation.

At the end of his life Mauthner had reflected on the seductiveness of language for political ends, a seductiveness that goes together, in his view, with the "decisive displacement of religion by the nation". We today forge entire books in the service of a "confessionalization of the sciences" and in the name of a "nation". On his view, through politics, this "mother of lies", an artificial weave is produced in which human beings are wrapped up in deceptive, false and lifeless ways. However, on Mauthner's conception, there is only one fundament of politics, cultural and sociality, that is the "love of the mother tongue".¹⁴³ From the mother tongue, the ground of all community, there originates both individuality and common possession. In contrast, reference to the "fatherland" merely separates and invigorates a difference that is accompanied by "hatred of peoples".¹⁴⁴

It is difficult to see what Mauthner means with these hints. It is obvious that in later years he tries to mitigate the destructive character of his critique of language. But where is ground that allows us to surmount lies and illusion, restlessness and despair? Mauthner seems to strive for a return to a domain that prior to all linguistic critical reflection and is not destroyed by it. But what does the con-

140 Landauer's "Brief an Mauthner (29.09.1914)" in: Delf and Schöps (eds.), *Gustav Landauer – Fritz Mauthner. Briefwechsel 1890–1919*, p. 291.

141 Mauthner's "Brief an Landauer (15.11.1914)" in: Delf and Schöps (eds.), *Gustav Landauer – Fritz Mauthner. Briefwechsel 1890–1919*, p. 294.

142 Landauer's "Brief an Mauthner (18.12.1914)" in: Delf and Schöps (eds.), *Gustav Landauer – Fritz Mauthner. Briefwechsel 1890–1919*, p. 297.

143 Fritz Mauthner, *Muttersprache und Vaterland*, pp. 58–59.

144 Fritz Mauthner, *Muttersprache und Vaterland*, p. 60.

cept of the “mother tongue” mean if not a crude naturalism and revisionism? How is it that the scholar who even himself comes from a situation that is “language menagerie” situation, could be given an exit from a situation that is, in all languages and cultures, merely relational – in Mauthner’s words a “between”? The last remarks of the linguistic sceptic remain a great enigma, perhaps even a small stupidity.

What remains of Mauthner’s critique of language? We have seen that Mauthner endeavours to liberate language from all grammatical-ontological presumptuousness, from the categorical application of individual words, from the substantive persistence of individual forms of words and from “word-monsters [*Wortungeheuern*]”. His way leads him up to the exposure of the illusionary character of language as such. Mauthner’s scepticism about language proves itself to be radical because for one thing it offers the choice between resigned silence and redemptive deed, for another, but offers no reliable criteria for decision making. This suggests that pre-theoretical reasons for the critique of language are predominant. Among these is doubtlessly a religious-critical impulse that is exhausted in the struggle against the theological roots of the theory of language, i.e., for Mauthner the dogma of the actuality content of language. Among these as well is a radical individualism that emphatically resists a general human willingness to sacrifice individuality to each changing conception of unity (belief, nature, people, language of the people). And among these reasons too is a deep mistrust of any organization of actuality that does not lie in the responsibility of self and its constitution in “language life”.

Here is not the place to research the hidden influence of Mauthner’s critique of language. Traces of this reception might be primarily found in literary and ideological texts.¹⁴⁵ Wittgenstein’s relation to Mauthner is not conclusively clarified with these considerations. Evidently Wittgenstein’s fundamental operation of a distinction between grammatical and logical forms of language has no equivalent in Mauthner’s writings. Nevertheless, there are considerable parallels with regard to an analysis of the function of language for the praxis of life and to the practicing of a critical distance to the everyday world, not least the common emphasis on the mystic (silence) as an escape from the dominance of the forms of language.

The way from a critique of language to a critique of cultural is surveyed once again by Ernst Cassirer. His reading of Mauthner serves him as a counterfoil

145 As regards this context I refer to a book that is still in the making. In a manuscript of a monograph on Mauthner that has not been published up to now and which I was generously allowed to see. Jacques Le Rider looks into the traces of Mauthner’s work and its subsequent impact in context.

therein. In the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* [*Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*] (1923) Cassirer discusses the “problem of language” in two respects. For one thing, he recapitulates the history of philosophy from antiquity up to the 19th century (Chapter I); for another he views human cultural history with systematic intent and distinguishes three developmental phases: the phase of sensible expression (Chapter II), the phase of intuitive expression and then language as expression of conceptual thinking (Chapter IV) and finally language as expression of logical forms of relation (Chapter V).¹⁴⁶

Cassirer engages with Mauthner in the context of the second chapter. What is at issue for him here is the developmental/evolutionary-historical fact that the transition from the animalistic to the specifically human evolution/development in language is to be understood as a transition from affective apprehension to reflective concepts. For the further course of evolution, this transition creates the possibility for the change of forms of language to no longer take place only within the relation of sensible material and intellectual form but increasingly also on the level of the forms of language themselves.

The path from mere reflex always leads up more determinately to different stages of ‘reflection’. In the emergence of structured sound, in the fact that – to speak with Goethe – the “sound is rounded into tones”, a general phenomenon is presented to us which we encounter in the different regions of the mind in a variety of new forms.¹⁴⁷

Cassirer speaks of how the symbolic functionality of language always becomes more pronounced in the cultural-historical process. In the theory of language this occurrence correlates to the gradual replacement of the picture theory [*Abbildtheorie*]. If the forms of language no longer depict objects, they are an insecure means to knowledge of actuality. Language does not capture things in themselves, it does not seize “the immediacy of life”. One consequence is that the objective and subjective views of the order of things break apart from one another. Scepticism about language comes into play here and confronts the empty generality of linguistic forms with the individual determinacy of speech. Radical scepticism about language thus exhausts itself in the subversion of the ontological basis of the picture theory and thus finds its methodological legitimation. However, on Cassirer’s view it goes too far when it thinks that language is only an “apparent value”, a “rule of a game”, that is not bound to the claim

¹⁴⁶ See Hartung, *Das Maß des Menschen*, pp. 224–240.

¹⁴⁷ Ernst Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, Vol. 1: *Die Sprache*, p. 134.

“to belong to, to represent or even to comprehend something actual, be it the ‘inner’ or the ‘outer’ world”.¹⁴⁸

According to Cassirer the linguistic sceptic Mauthner destroys the naive ontology of the picture theory and at the same time recognizes the “futility [*Nichtigkeit*] of its measure” which suggests it lies close to an uninhibited negation of actuality. However, the belief in actuality as a given being and whole is destroyed, the power of symbolic formation to establish actuality shows itself, as it were, in its independence and its own lawfulness. “In truth [...] the being of every form cannot be sought in what it expresses but only in the kind and manner, in the mode and the inner lawfulness of the expression itself.”¹⁴⁹

The liberation from language that Mauthner demands and the curse of language that he is not capable of escaping must, according to Cassirer, be otherwise interpreted. Liberation only takes place on the level of the functional lawfulness of the construction of language – in the transition from mimetic to analogical and finally to symbolic expression; we only succumb to the curse of language then when we have the illusion of being able to penetrate immediate actuality – the Kantian “things in themselves”, bare life [*das bloße Leben*] and pure existence. This actuality is closed to us humans, but we open ourselves to another reality whose actuality arises from its functionality.¹⁵⁰

Cassirer integrates Mauthner's position as a sceptical method into his own philosophy and by this means defuses it. This is not an unusual procedure in his work. He speaks of Mauthner once again in his work of the theory of language. In his first lecture at Yale University (1941/ 1942) he poses the question: “is not a philosophy of language definitely out of date?” By way of explanation he offers up the idea that a

skeptical attitude has prevailed in the literature of the last decades. What was affirmed here was not a positive but a negative, not a constructive but a destructive theory of language. Well known books as for instance Fritz Mauthner[s] ‘*Kritik der Sprache*’ [...] have followed this way.¹⁵¹

148 Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, Vol. 1, p. 137. Cassirer places a footnote here which reads “See Fr. Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, especially I, pp. 25 ff., p. 70, p. 175, p. 193 and elsewhere.”

149 Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, Vol. 1, p. 138.

150 Cassirer, *An Essay on Man. An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*, p. 35: “The principle of symbolism, with its universality, validity, and general applicability, is the magic word, The Open Sesame! giving access to the specifically human world, to the world of human culture. Once man is in possession of the magic key further progress is assured.”

151 Cassirer, “Seminar on Symbolism and Philosophy of Language. *Vorlesung New Haven 1941/ 1942*”, pp. 201–202.

Apart from his surprising supposition that his listeners at Yale University in 1941 were actually familiar with Mauthner's *Contributions to the Critique of Language* [*Beiträge zur Sprachkritik*], Cassirer is also still not ready to admit an existential dimension to scepticism about language. And he does not recognize the pre-theoretical implications of Mauthner's philosophy of language that determine its basic melody. But he opens the way to a constructive critique of language and culture in that he recalls the insights of his predecessors from Steinthal through Lazarus, and on down to Simmel.

In Cassirer's theory of symbolic forms, the history of reflections sketched here the event character of language is lead to its last coherent form. After him this line of the traditional falls into oblivion. As was stated in the introduction, it seems to be possible to have different perspectives and to get different answers in dealing with this topic. A longer look at Mauthner's work, however, allows us to make a preliminary assessment. Evidently we no longer share his fury regarding the critique of religion nor in his radical critique of all forms of institutionalization. His critique of language strikes the sciences, law, manners and customs as well as our values and convictions which, in its zeal for destruction, are not left behind. Mauthner's cultural pessimism appears as the external side of his denial of origin: The Judaism of his forefathers he neither considers capable of forming a unique identity under the conditions of a modern society nor does he share the optimism of others. "German speaking Jews" (Arendt) show that the de-emphasization of origin makes possible the complete integration into this specific society. According to Mauthner every integration of self and world is an illusory affair. What remains at the end is an isolated individual that in his or her struggle for himself or herself has to confront the whole world. Mauthner had laid claim to a form of life for himself that is characterized by heroic despair.

7 From the Critique of Language to a ‘Critique of Culture’ – Ernst Cassirer

Language is to be regarded as the very focus of all human activities. None of these activities would be possible without its constant help. It may be compared to a spiritual ether that fills the whole space of our human life.
(Ernst Cassirer)¹

The central theme of Ernst Cassirer’s philosophy is reflecting on language as the source and medium of the knowledge of actuality and, in his later writings, the identification of a specific difference that distinguishes human beings from other life forms. This is not a new finding in research on Cassirer’s work but it has not yet been worked out in the context of the debate set forth here, especially that of the linguistics of the 19th century. However, this very task is precisely what is necessary in order to understand the questions to which Cassirer seeks answers. Without this background we do not yet have a clear view of the standard for the further question as to whether Cassirer’s considerations of demarcating nature and culture, of the emergence of human culture and its “essence”, and of its structure and functionality have anything important to do with our current constellation of problems.

Cassirer’s considerations on the theory of language and culture do not simply belong within a context immanent to his work. As set out in the framework of his study, there is a line of linguistic-theoretical reflections within the 19th and early 20th century that, so to speak, leads to the centre of Cassirer’s work.

7.1 Connection to the Humboldt Tradition – on the Theory of Language

When we look at Cassirer’s writings on the theory of language and place them within the frame of discussions of the 19th century – as Cassirer had himself referred to them in detail in the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1923) – then it clearly seems, at first glance, that the results of linguistics and the theory of language were an important influence on Cassirer. Cassirer had been particularly preoccupied with questions on the theory of language from

¹ Cassirer, *Vorlesungen und Studien zur philosophischen Anthropologie (1939–1943)*, p. 303.

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the time at which he began to work out his concept of a philosophy of culture at the latest.² The essay *The Kantian Elements in Wilhelm von Humboldt’s Philosophy of Language* [*Die Kantischen Elemente in Wilhelm von Humboldts Sprachphilosophie*] (1922), the extensive analysis in the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1923) as well as subsequent works within the vicinity of the *Essay on Man* dating from the 1940s are significant milestones on this path.

The essay on Humboldt’s philosophy of language is perhaps one of the most brilliant of Cassirer’s texts from the 1920s. At the centre of this text is a strategic wrestling with the concept of development. Humboldt was singled out from linguistic-historical research by Cassirer because he had first outlined “the notion of dynamic development”.³ His goal was to bring together the empirical material of a natural history of language with the transcendental point of view that language is a unified form of spirit. That is Humboldt’s overall intuition which remains authoritative for Cassirer. “Steinthal had characterized [Humboldt’s overall intuition] as ‘Kantianized Spinozism’. However, this characteristic and concise formulation that is assumed here neither, on the systematic nor the historical side, expresses the opposition in a fashion that is completely apt”.⁴

Cassirer had occupied himself in detail with this great commentator on Humboldt’s writings. He recognizes in him the philosophical mind that had set Humboldt’s ambiguous locutions into concise formulations. Nevertheless, while the distance to Steinthal must not be overlooked here, it must also not be overstressed. If Steinthal had not characterized Humboldt’s overall intuition in a way that was “completely apt”, he had nonetheless signalled an important point because Cassirer largely follows Steinthal’s guidelines in his own commentary on the unfolding of Humboldt’s theory of language. Although he objects to his reading of Humboldt for its strongly overrating of the element of “Spinozism” and its underrating of the element of “Kantianism”, what is also at issue for Cassirer here is showing that Humboldt solves a problem that Kant could not formulate and which only Steinthal brings out precisely. What is meant here is the reconciliation of the oppositions of external and internal world, object and subject, matter and form, life and spirit, nature and culture in a concept of dynamic development. And this concept is distinguished precisely by the fact that it undermines dualistic positions that Neo-Kantianism is especially so familiar with.⁵

2 See Hartung, *Maß des Menschen*, pp. 224–240.

3 Cassirer, “Die Kantischen Elemente in Wilhelm von Humboldts Sprachphilosophie”, p. 118.

4 Cassirer, “Die Kantischen Elemente in Wilhelm von Humboldts Sprachphilosophie”, p. 118. On this see Chapter 2, above.

5 The thesis that Cassirer is a representative of Neo-Kantianism (Ferrari, Orth and others) in the 1920s up to the 1940s requires an urgent revision. On this, see the “Conclusion” to this study.

However, for the human world, which constitutes itself in the medium of language, “the true solution is in the unity of human nature”.⁶ This thought is not further elaborated in the 1923 essay on Humboldt, yet it concerns a basic idea within Steinthal’s commentary on Humboldt. Thus the question remains as to what concept of a unity of nature Cassirer favours, if not a materialistic one (whether in the form of Spinozism or Darwinism).

Cassirer tackles just this problem in the first volume of his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. He vividly describes how the “original” equation of language and being gradually dissolved in Western intellectual history. The path leads from myth to logos. In its individual stages the path leads from the initial being inhibited “in the circles of mere existence [*Dasein*]”⁷ through Platonic philosophy⁸ continuing through to research in the Renaissance on the origin of language up to the philosophy of modernity that outlines a “universal rational form of language”. The remnants of a mythical world view gradually become extinguished and ultimately this includes the idea that an object of sensible perception is reproduced in knowledge and in linguistic expression.⁹ For Cassirer, the conclusion follows from this representation that our primary interest in linguistic-theoretical reflections has to do with the fact that we consider the contribution of language to be necessary for the “construction of knowledge”.¹⁰

When Cassirer summarizes 19th-century linguistics and theory of language, he at the same time provides an evaluation of it. In his view, research into language as classified in the “domain of natural events” by Darwin, took a regressive step because it had lost sight of the creative power of language as function of the spirit. Linguistics is on the road to disclosing incalculable masses of biological, anthropological and ethnological material and, owing to the shift to psychological research which orients itself towards the natural sciences, the concept of nature is lost. What the linguists, resting supine upon the natural sciences, still characterize as nature is nothing more than a merely apparent unity.

6 Cassirer, “Die Kantischen Elemente in Wilhelm von Humboldts Sprachphilosophie”, p. 125.

7 Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, Vol. 1, p. 64.

8 See also Cassirer, *Die Philosophie der Griechen von den Anfängen bis Platon*, especially pp. 7–54.

9 Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, Vol. 1, pp. 82–83: “If language in its complex conceptual terms [*Begriffsworten*] is not so much a reflection of sensible existence but rather a reflection of cognitive operations, this reflecting can and must be carried out in infinitely various and diverse ways. If the content and expression of the concept does not depend upon the matter of the individual sensible representations [*Vorstellung*], but [*sondern*] on the form of association [*Verknüpfung*] then each new linguistic concept fundamentally represents a new creation of spirit.”

10 Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, Vol. 1, p. 90.

However, since Humboldt there is a counter-conception that is retained in one line of tradition. As Cassirer presents it, in recent times Karl Vossler’s return to Humboldt’s philosophy of language has shown that the struggle for the notion of development, particularly in research into language, remains undecided. Vossler had brought out in an incisive fashion the “great gaps in the Spinozist system and in all dogmatic-monist systems of modern fabrication”. Although we “can very well [*sehr wohl*] imagine a purposeless event, a history without development [...], we – and this is the crux of the matter – will never *understand* it”.¹¹ This gap refers back to a necessity of insisting in the field of research into language once again – and this time just as radically as his predecessors from Steintal down to Mauthner – that language is not a fact but a product, not a state but an event.¹²

In the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* Cassirer turns to the process of linguistic formation and gives a schematic analysis of this. According to its fundamental idea, namely that all development in the world of human beings progresses from myth to logos, that means from the concrete to the general, from the sensible to the abstract, he also maintains that language, in spite of all initial bondage to the world of sensible impression, shows a tendency towards the logical-universal through which it is progressively liberated to always purer and more independent spirituality of form.¹³ There is thus, at the beginning of all linguistic development, a synthesis of thinking and speaking that is already rich in tension and which, on the basis of this tension, motivates all development. Hence Cassirer takes Humboldt’s thesis seriously, namely that we cannot go back to the original synthesis of thinking and speaking in either historical or epistemological intent.¹⁴

11 See Vossler, *Sprache als Schöpfung und Entwicklung*, pp. 2–3; see also his *Positivismus und Idealismus in der Sprachwissenschaft*.

12 See Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, Vol. 1, pp. 120–121: “As a result, the positivist schema of consideration is not only gradually relaxed but ultimately blown up completely: that is particularly evident in Karl Vossler’s writings. [...] Humboldt’s notion that language is never to be conceived as a mere work (*Ergon*) but as activity, that everything that is a “fact” in it is only fully understandable if it is traced back to spiritual “activities” from which it originates, experiences its renewal here under changed historical conditions.”

13 Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, Vol. 1, p. 279.

14 Humboldt, “Einleitung zum Kawiwerk”, pp. 72–73: “It is impossible to think the emergence of language as beginning from the designating of objects through words and from there passing over to [their] joining together. In actuality discourse is not put together from words preceding it but inversely – words emerge from out of the whole of discourse. They are however sensed already without actual reflection in the crudest and most uncultivated discourse, for the formation of words is an essential requirement of speaking.”

The price of this argumentation is a close, systematic link between language and the form of knowledge which for Cassirer necessarily implies that we are only able to deal with the basic questions of the theory of language in terms of an epistemological problematic. The astonishing scope of linguistic expression beyond this narrow setting, dealt with by Lazarus in particular, interests Cassirer only to the extent that he wants to bracket it. He thus emphasizes that his reflections on the theory of language are formulated in clear distinction to any emphasis on actuality or being, such as that which comes to expression in *Lebensphilosophie* and in new attempts at a rehabilitation of ontology. Nevertheless, Cassirer also knows that a fundamental heterogeneity of forms of language and knowledge is not to be sublated [*nicht aufzuheben ist*]:

the development of language once again reflects a problem that extends far beyond its radius and that has played a decisive role in the history of logical and philosophical thinking. More clearly than at any other point, it can be recognized here how this thinking develops with language but also and always at the same time against it.¹⁵

For Cassirer, the development of language remains, despite all instances of doubts, linked to the model of a successful interrelationship between the sensible and the intellectual.¹⁶ “The same fundamental direction [*Grundrichtung*] of language” holds true everywhere, that is shown in the correlation of cooperation and conflict between language and thought. While all thought is linguistically composed, language, however, is not merely the expression of thought contents. And when the development of language is considered in relation to the development of logical conceptual forms, this thought-language relationship also becomes laden with tension, making any one-sided explanation of one form of spirit by from the other is forbidden. At the same time, however, there is also no grounding of this correlation because the original synthesis of language and thought shows itself to be epistemological and historical limit.

These brief comments on some of Cassirer’s writings already make it clear how indebted he is to the line of tradition starting with Steinthal. Cassirer is certain that the basic problem of his philosophy of symbols, even if he later transforms it into an anthropology and a philosophy of culture, is to be found in the analysis of the correlation of language and thought.

15 Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, Vol. 1, p. 296.

16 Cassirer, *Der Begriff der symbolischen Form im Aufbau der Geisteswissenschaften*, pp. 17–18.

7.2 Naturalism versus Humanism – the Transition to the Philosophy of Culture

In his essay *Naturalistic and Humanistic Grounding of the Philosophy of Culture* [*Naturalistische und humanistische Begründung der Kulturphilosophie*], Cassirer had fought against every theoretical approach that operates with the “axiom of universal determinism”.¹⁷ In the varieties of Spinozism and materialism especially, as well as in Romantic natural philosophy and the doctrine of the spirit of the people [Volksgeistlehre] of the 19th century, Cassirer recognizes the popularization of a worldview whose origin extends back centuries, a worldview that could only employ its influence under the conditions of a time of decline for metaphysical theories. The victory march of biology in particular gives the struggle for “a science” a specific new meaning.¹⁸

In the face of this precarious situation, Cassirer discusses whether there remains yet another fundament for the philosophy of culture or whether it should surrender itself to naturalism. His answer is unequivocal: Naturalism demands the destruction of the individual moments of life in favour of a generality, whether this is called being, cell, organism or people and culture. For him this demand is equivalent to a theoretical error and a misguided social and cultural praxis and he raises the question of “at which point [...] we can apply the leverage such that the individual being and the individual deed again win back an independent significance and an independent value?”¹⁹

Cassirer’s answer to this question implies a recourse to the line of tradition already presented here – the difference being that he is not only interested in linguistic and cultural-theoretical issues but, over and beyond this, in an intellectual-historical retrospection that draws upon the work of Herder, Goethe, and Humboldt most especially.²⁰ He recognizes in their writings a “new humanism” which is worthy of this name because what is at stake is the whole of the world of the spirit of human beings. “Humanitas” means, as Cassirer sketches in this context, not just a form of morality or a determinate social order, but the form of human existence as such that we see in Herder, Goethe and Humboldt:

17 Cassirer, “Naturalistische und humanistische Begründung der Kulturphilosophie”.

18 Cassirer, “Naturalistische und humanistische Begründung der Kulturphilosophie”, p. 9.

19 Cassirer, “Naturalistische und humanistische Begründung der Kulturphilosophie”, p. 14.

20 The reference to Herder is especially problematic for he will also be explained to be a pioneer of a model of the organic life of the people. On the ambivalence of Herder’s conception, see Isaiah Berlin’s “Herder ad the Enlightenment”.

What they seek under the name of humanism seems to extend to any formation at all, no matter in what particular area of life it should take place. As the basic feature of all human existence it is apparent that the human being does not simply arise in the abundance of external impressions but that it subdues this abundance by impressing a determine form on them that ultimately originates from the human being itself, from the thinking, feeling, willing subject.²¹

Humanity is thus presented as the “medium” in which the human productivity for form-giving, thus also living language, is realized. All form-giving is thereby to be understood in the mode of mediatedness for “what the human being accomplishes is objectification, self-intuition on the basis of theoretical, aesthetic and ethical formation”.²²

The 1939 essay represents a decisive milestone for the further development of Cassirer’s conception. While he had previously still assumed that the claim of the mere correlation of thought and language as well as the adequacy of the inner principle of form-giving and external form does not need to undertake the task of laying a groundwork, he now puts a teleological structure of the capacity for form-giving into play as the “distinguishing character of the human being”, a character that allows the individual objectification achievements of language (and other formative principles) to be conceived as directional. The immanent teleology of symbolic functional achievements that is thus implied serves as a regulative idea. At the same time it also allows the drawing of a sharp line of demarcation between human action and bare physical events, thereby allowing the possibility of evading the attack of naturalism. In the process of objectification, the human being emerges, as Cassirer emphasizes, from bondage to nature and creates its own intellectual/spiritual world – it *becomes* what it already *is* in its determinateness according to its participation in humanity. This ideal of humanity is a merely regulative principle in Kant’s sense, but it gets carried over into the Herderian concept of cultural development.²³

The milestone from 1939 is to be understood as an increasing influence of Hegel’s philosophy on Cassirer’s thought. This influence occurs, as with everything in Cassirer’s intellectual development, in a completely undramatic fashion. He was intensively involved with Hegel’s teachings in the context of his works on the fourth volume of the *History of the Problem of Knowledge* [*Geschichte des Erkenntnisproblems*] as well as on the study *On the Logic of the Cultural Sciences* [*Zur Logik der Kulturwissenschaften*]. Hence Cassirer admits that since the late

21 Cassirer, “Naturalistische und humanistische Begründung der Kulturphilosophie”, p. 16.

22 Cassirer, “Naturalistische und humanistische Begründung der Kulturphilosophie”, p. 17.

23 Cassirer, “Naturalistische und humanistische Begründung der Kulturphilosophie”, p. 28.

1930s he could not, in his reflections on the theme of the development of language and culture, avoid an examination of Hegel. Cassirer's philosophy of culture assumes another "logic" of the form of humanities and the cultural sciences. To a great extent, he plays this off against Hegel. For in the philosophy of culture as well what is at stake is a comprehensive presentation of the understanding of the world which Hegel had brought forward in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* [*Phänomenologie des Geistes*] but what is at issue therein is no longer a matter of solving this problem "as a whole at one fell swoop".²⁴ Rather, it is shown that the relationship between a multiplicity in the experiential world and the striving for unity in our discursive thinking is dynamic, historical and variable. The whole of the understanding of the world stands in a developmental horizon that is interminable.

In the search for a unity of the human spirit there can accordingly be only one functional unity that is at issue – a striving towards unification of the symbolic principle of formation – a unity that asserts itself in penetrating the fullness of the phenomenal world. Only "in this regard" – as it says in *On the Logic of the Cultural Sciences* –

can a *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* retain the claim to that unity and universality that metaphysics in its dogmatic form had to abandon. It can not only unite the different ways and directions of knowledge of the world in itself but, over and beyond this, it can recognize the results of every attempt of understanding the world, every interpretation of the world, that the human spirit is capable of and conceive it in its particularity.²⁵

7.3 Aporiai of the Theory of Language and Culture

In the academic year 1941/1942 Ernst Cassirer held a lecture at Yale University entitled *Symbolism and Philosophy of Language*. In the framework of this lecture he treated the basic problem of the theory of language within the horizon of an analysis of general structural problems of symbolic thought. The point of his later studies on the notion of development is that he conceives the cultural process, following the guiding thread of the development of language, as the increasing solidification of a double correlation, given in an original synthesis, between thought and language as well as between formative principle and form. In his view, "in the end [it is] 'the same' human being that we ... meet in the develop-

²⁴ See Cassirer, "Zur Logik des Symbolbegriffs", p. 137.

²⁵ See Cassirer, *Zur Logik der Kulturwissenschaften. Erste Studie: Der Gegenstand der Kulturwissenschaft*, p. 376.

ment of culture over and over again”, a being which expresses itself in language, religion, art and so on.²⁶ Language in particular is the expression of a spiritual energy and as such one of the “original manifestations of humanity”.

Cassirer develops his new approach to a philosophical anthropology by examining highly influential counter-positions: For one, there is the naturalistic theory of human beings inaugurated by Darwin and for another there is the classical philosophical theory of human beings based on a dualistic notion of body and soul, of the intelligible world and the sensible world. Cassirer pushes both of these positions to their aporiai. Accordingly, if a philosophical theory of human beings is to be possible, then it cannot rest upon a concept of the essence of human beings but only on the functional unity we call the human being or “man”:

The essence of man is to be found nowhere but in his works – in those fundamental human activities on which [...] all cultural life is based. To understand man, we have no other way than to inquire into these activities. We have no more reliable access to the knowledge of human nature than by exploring the nature of language, of art, of science, of religion, of morality[.]²⁷

Cassirer’s theory is that only with regard to a spiritual energy, from which objectification achievements arise, can a common basis of functional achievements and a unity of cultural consciousness be determined. The concept of the symbolic form is the connecting link between these levels of representation. It characterizes the medium in which the energy flows and is directed, and it serves as the guarantee [*Garant*] for the unity of human culture. Cassirer hopes for a deepening of the problem of symbolism from an extended analysis of the concept of symbolic form:

We must try to follow up, step by step, the gradual evolution that leads from the first dawnings of symbolic thought to its achievement, to its most perfect and refined forms. By slowly and patiently pursuing this way we may hope to reach our aim: to come to a philosophical concept of man that comprises the whole of his fundamental faculties and his most characteristic activities.²⁸

26 Cassirer, *Zur Logik der Kulturwissenschaften. Dritte Studie: Naturbegriffe und Kulturbegriffe*, p. 377.

27 Cassirer, “Seminar on Symbolism and Philosophy of Language. Vorlesung New Haven 1941/1942”, p. 245.

28 Cassirer, “Seminar on Symbolism and Philosophy of Language. Vorlesung New Haven 1941/1942”, p. 251.

Cassirer positions himself on the side of Herder, Kant and Humboldt and opposes Rousseau and the cultural Romanticism. This, concisely conceived, is the intellectual-historical situation of Cassirer's critical philosophy of culture which is accompanied by the insight that we cannot step out of the conflict between nature and culture. Put positively, bidding farewell to the natural human being consequentially means turning towards a "definition of man as '*homo symbolicus*' – as a being that always creates symbols and that lives in a world of symbols".²⁹

Cassirer discusses the basic structure of *Homo symbolicus* starting from Kant's transcendental aesthetic and the biologist Uexküll's theory of the environment. Space and time are both characteristics of the animal perceptual world [*Merkwelt*] as well as of the symbolic functional achievements that are alone accorded to human beings. While on the one hand they are the conditions of environmental constraint, on the other hand they constitute the sphere of mediation which distinguishes the world of human understanding. Thus, for example, the concept of space is one of the fundamental patterns of the specifically human functional sphere. It is no contradiction to this that the consciousness of this symbolic functional achievement is a late product of cultural and intellectual-historical development. As Cassirer had already stated in his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, the moment of self-reflexivity is missing in the process of objectification for long stretches of time. To put it otherwise: the double correlation between thought and language as well as between formative principle and form is indeed immanent to the process itself but is only made explicit at a later level of development. In order to make this line of thought plausible, Cassirer describes the evolution of (self-)consciousness from the context of mythical thinking all the way up to its most abstract expressions, for example in the notion of an absolute and homogenous space. However, this picture is only complete when the perspective is deflected from the individual phenomena and the "cooperation of symbolic thought" (of language, art, knowledge and so on) comes into view. Only in this way does an overall picture of the process of objectification arise.

In Cassirer's view, the overall process documents the potential (that can scarcely be overestimated) of human beings to exceed the natural limits of their existence and to create their own dimension of their actions, a cultural world. Seen overall, the process of objectification is dependent on the extent to which the consciousness of the symbolic character of language matures.

We [...] have to prove that this process of objectification is to a very high degree depending on language. Language is the first to show man his new way and to guide him on this way.

²⁹ Cassirer, "Seminar on Symbolism and Philosophy of Language. Vorlesung New Haven 1941/1942", p. 261.

It is the theoretical basis[,] the prerequisite of all the forms of objective representation. By this the things that surrounded us and that seem in a certain way to overwhelm us with their superior power begin to win a new face. They are no longer impediments and obstacles to our own free activity. [...] This view is a characteristic and a privilege of man.³⁰

As Cassirer emphasizes, only a complete picture of the process of objectification can give final information on the power of symbolic thought. Such a picture would also uncover the Janus-face of symbolic functions, because although this is indeed the condition for the possibility that the human being is brought out from bondage to nature, it is not therefore a pure instrument of liberation:

This double nature, this ambiguity of symbolism results from the fact that man when using the different forms of symbolism – when using the words of language, when dealing with mythical or religious images – does not know himself to be the creator of these symbols.³¹

Cassirer here outlines a sceptical picture of the dialectical structure of symbolic consciousness which is fundamentally different from the optimistic, progress-oriented guiding idea of his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*.

Cassirer's sceptical basic position that matures in the 1930s and the early 1940s allows the process of objectification to appear in another light. This is a thoroughly dialectical process, as the periodically recurring and escalating self-problematization of human beings proves. The moment of liberation is not inscribed in it, but must always be asserted anew. The danger always exists of the images, in which the human being projects its world and in which its understanding of the world takes hold, turn in the form of their own power against the human being. Here a motif of Mauthner's linguistic scepticism returns, which Cassirer intensively examines under the heading of the "secret fallacies of symbolism". The secret fallacies show, in Uexküll's words (which Cassirer follows), that the functional sphere of human activity can, in a way, be closed, which seclusion is comparable to the functional sphere of animals.³²

30 Cassirer, "Seminar on Symbolism and Philosophy of Language. Vorlesung New Haven 1941/1942", p. 268.

31 Cassirer, "Seminar on Symbolism and Philosophy of Language. Vorlesung New Haven 1941/1942", p. 273.

32 See Mannheim, "Über eine Eigenart kultursoziologischer Erkenntnis", p. 47: "So long as culture is not experienced as culture, cultural creation takes place so to speak behind the back of the creative subject." Berger and Luckmann, *Die gesellschaftliche Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit*, p. 65, speak of the "paradox that the human being is capable for producing a world that it experiences as other than a human product".

Against this backdrop, being human for Cassirer is also a problem that is always to be solved anew, that we can only slowly approach. The important task for human culture is that of assuming rather than recoiling from the curse of symbolism – that is, the possibility that a form turns against its formative principle and rigidifies. Coming very close to Mauthner's despairing theory of language, Cassirer calls upon human beings in modernity to recognize language as the medium of culturality in the tension between subjection and liberation.³³

The lecture *Symbolism and Philosophy of Language* from the academic year 1941–2 is Cassirer's laboratory for the clarification of his positioning of the problem of language and cultural theory. Basically, the question appears whether his theory of symbolism can avoid radical scepticism about language without falling back into the rigid position which it wants to leave behind, namely that of adequation between language and being. Cassirer undertakes the attempt to avoid the aporia of this positioning of the problem through the working out of an anthropological perspective. The analysis of human time-consciousness plays a central role here. Time is, as Cassirer emphasizes, the form of life as such, for all organic life equally that takes place in time and under the conditions of time. However, time is also a pure form of intuition in the Kantian sense that, as the medium of symbolic thought, represents an active capacity. Hence Cassirer can conclude that human beings alone are not swept away by the stream of time but are capable of a peculiar achieving of distance: they can isolate the individual elements of the course of time, combine [them] anew in remembrance and they have the capacity to step out of temporal succession because they live under the aspect of past and future time.

The function of symbolic thought and time consciousness can be said to intersect for the one would not be conceivable without the other – "Symbolism constitutes the very nature and essence of time."³⁴ Without the presupposition of a symbolic function of the human spirit, the achievement of distance and the abstracting of a coherent course of time – as the time of life and the time of culture – would not be possible at all. This achievement, however, is the fundamental moment of the human being's emergence from nature. In the reflexive

33 Cassirer, "Seminar on Symbolism and Philosophy of Language. Vorlesung New Haven 1941/1942", p. 273: "This could not be done except by a very long and a very slow process of thought – a process which even in our times is far from having reached its end[.] Human culture had to fulfil the difficult task of changing the curse of symbolism into blessing. The same force that in the beginnings of culture seemed to fitter and to subjugate man had to be turned into an instrument of liberation."

34 Cassirer, "Seminar on Symbolism and Philosophy of Language. Vorlesung New Haven 1941/1942", p. 285.

moment, that is essential to human time-consciousness, the human being is always already beyond the perceptual horizon of the environment given to him – “man does not break the chain that unites him with all the other beings. He does not abandon nature nor does he ascend over its limits. But he develops a new gift in the circle of nature itself. Out of an organic being he becomes a historical being.”³⁵

On Cassirer’s conception, it took a whole series of dramatic conflicts until human time-consciousness in itself carried out the decisive achievement of objectification, that is, the discovery of the human being as the being that has a history. Only was only after incessant doubting in the fundamentals of natural experience of time that the symbolic functional achievement of time-consciousness is released – this refers to a consciousness that reflects the changes of the forms of human life in the historical perspective. We can speak of a socio-cultural apperceptive achievement here, one whose basic features were already projected by Lazarus.³⁶ Reflection on the change of the forms of life allows an integration of the human being in this very world of forms, that appears as constant and secure in spite of all changes.³⁷

In this way, Cassirer’s philosophy of culture receives a clearly delimited task, for it

can do no more than to describe the fundamental conditions of human life and human mind – it cannot alter these conditions. Man, it is true, has an eternity and an immortality of his own – an eternity that is denied to all the other organic beings. But this eternity is not an ontological but a symbolic one.³⁸

35 Cassirer, “Seminar on Symbolism and Philosophy of Language. Vorlesung New Haven 1941/1942”, p. 286.

36 Cassirer “An Essay on Man. A Philosophical Anthropology”, p. 457: “Man is not only a social being but first of all an organic being. He must therefore possess the same faculty of reacting to mere signals; and in many cases of his physical life he need not go beyond this faculty. But from the first dawning of ‘reflective thought’ this sphere is transgressed. We may describe this change by many and various terms. We may call it ‘*reflection*’ in the sense of Herder; we may prefer to call it by the Leibnizian name ‘*apperception*’; we may choose the words ‘attention’ or ‘abstraction’[.] All these terms point to the same direction; they are characteristics of the same fundamental and specifically ‘human’ attitude.” See Chapter 3 below.

37 For the continuation of this idea, see Paul Ricoeur’s “Ideologie und Utopie: zwei Ausdrucksformen des sozialen Imaginären” and *L’Idéologie et l’Utopie*. On this, see Hartung, “Ideologie und Anthropologie. Von Marx’ Ideologiekritik zu Ricoeurs Theorie des Imaginären”.

38 Cassirer, “Seminar on Symbolism and Philosophy of Language. Vorlesung New Haven 1941/1942”, p. 291.

The symbolic eternity here indicated involves a totality of the intuition of time, that refers to a region beyond the limits of human, experientially bound knowledge. On Cassirer's view the intuition of time provides the schema of sensible concepts, it is, in Kant's formulation, a "monogram of the pure a priori imagination", thus related to experience but nevertheless a subjective condition of intuition.³⁹ Only for *Homo symbolicus* is a "total intuition of time" possible which cannot be redeemed by experience nor secured by metaphysical speculation. However, it can be objectified through symbolically expressive achievements, above all through language.⁴⁰

The notion of a symbolic eternity is also a regulative idea in the Kantian sense. The dialectical picture of the processes of objectification of persistence and change [*Beharrung und Veränderung*], tradition and originality, is framed [*eingefasst*] within a regulative notion of the permanence of symbolic activity. In the alternating of the formations of symbolic productivity, for example of the systems of language and knowledge and religious images, a "perennial stream of symbolic thought" is continuously manifested.⁴¹ Only this dialectical tension – the inconclusiveness or interminability of the fields of symbolic function in themselves and in relation to one another under the condition of temporal succession – guarantees the permanence of the creative activity of human beings and the change of escaping the curse of a solidification of the symbolic world as a "steel enclosure" (Max Weber). Only thus is it comprehensible why Cassirer can still in the 1940s retain the optimistic perspective of the last century. He also sees the chance in such dark times for the human race to realize itself in the sense of an ideal of humanity.

Yet, Cassirer also cannot help but consider human culture from the point of view of danger because there is no certainty as regards the attainment of the goal. The existence of human culture is and remains always dependent on the flow of creative activity not running dry. The goal and the means of attaining the goal are worldly. Symbolic eternity realizes itself in time. Religious images, works of art and ideals of morality, do indeed transcend the temporal horizon of their origin but they do so only in a regulative sense. Symbolic eternity, as

39 See Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A 33–35. See Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, Vol. 3, pp. 189 ff.

40 Cassirer, "Seminar on Symbolism and Philosophy of Language. Vorlesung New Haven 1941/1942", p. 292. And p. 293: "It is not the immortality of the individual soul, but the immortality and eternity of culture – of art, religion, of morality, of philosophy. This sort of immortality is not in need of any metaphysical proof; it needs an active proof."

41 Cassirer, "Seminar on Symbolism and Philosophy of Language. Vorlesung New Haven 1941/1942", p. 295.

is vividly clear in Michelangelo's works, Goethe's writings, or Beethoven's music, does not mean timeless eternity. What Cassirer sees here is a "completion and consummation of time" in the moments of selective condensation of symbolic activity.⁴²

At this point in Cassirer's work and completely unexpectedly, a moment in salvation history flashes forth under the conditions of a strict world-immanence. This refers to a promise of a fulfilled time in time itself, that realizes itself in the symbolic process. In individual works of art the intuitively given view of the totality of time comes to expression. That is only a mediated fulfilment of totality and thus, measured against original intuition, no longer totality. For Cassirer this lack is an advantage because the idealized fullness of time in the symbol shapes [*prägt*] the entire field of practical life-conduct. Every human activity implies the representation of a future state. The future can only be thought in symbolic forms and maxims of conduct. Ideals are expressive forms of symbolic eternity. The ability of human beings to go beyond the limits of mere physical presence and to be responsible for an open future is manifested in them. And thus every moment of our life is, at least potentially, an "original manifestation of humanity".⁴³

7.4 From the Theory of Language to Anthropology

In the considerations that Cassirer hazards in the outline for a lecture, we see a constant endeavour to secure the double correlation between thought and language as well as between formative principle and form. The decisive question is now whether this problem can also be effectively determined against the background of research in evolutionary biology. The task could read as follows: How is it possible to continue to speak of a qualitative difference between human and non-human forms of life although there is an undeniable continuity in life process.⁴⁴

⁴² Cassirer, "Seminar on Symbolism and Philosophy of Language. Vorlesung New Haven 1941/1942", p. 295.

⁴³ Cassirer, "Seminar on Symbolism and Philosophy of Language. Vorlesung New Haven 1941/1942", p. 209: "[...] language cannot be regarded as the whole of this revelation. There are other energies of the human mind which in this respect are on the same level – that are an original manifestation of humanity in the same sense as language is[.]language cannot be regarded as the whole of this revelation. There are other energies of the human mind which in this respect are on the same level – that are an original manifestation of humanity in the same sense as language is[.]"

⁴⁴ On this see a deposition of Cassirer's from the Nachlass that makes this posing of the problem into a point of departure for his later studies on philosophical anthropology. Cassirer: "[Dis-

It is stated in his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* that the being of the human being is revealed in action.⁴⁵ Human action is not mere reacting or behaving but creative activeness. This activeness is the expression of a spiritual energy. From this originates all formations, forms, any creative dealing with what appears to us human beings mediated by the sense organs. Spiritual energy is the possibility placed and capable of being actualized in every human being, it is the potentiality of the human. Because it marks the universally human, a common basis for function achievements and a unity of cultural life can be inferred from it. The concept of the symbolic form is the connecting link; it characterizes the medium in which the energy flows and is directed, and it is also the guarantee for the unity of human culture. This unity, however, is only the result of development and not its presupposition. This is the entry point for the developmental-historical perspective in Cassirer's work in the 1940s.

We must try to follow up, step by step, the gradual evolution that leads from the first dawnings of symbolic thought to its achievement, to its most perfect and refined forms. By slowly and patiently pursuing this way we may hope to reach our aim: to come to a philosophical concept of man that comprises the whole of his fundamental faculties and his most characteristic activities.⁴⁶

The tracing of a gradual evolution of symbolic thought implies emerging from the antagonism of "Kant versus Darwin" and turning towards the concept of "critical monism". Cassirer mentions this conceptual term in his lecture from the year 1941/1942, where he outlines his concept of symbolism following hypotheses of the biologist Uexküll's theory of the environment.⁴⁷ For him, the key to the nature of the human being lies here. Everything depends upon the possibility of thinking [*der Denkmöglichkeit*] that a moment of discontinuity in the organic world which is given with the structural presuppositions of a specifically human nature is brought together with the thought of a continual transition between the individual organic forms. Uexküll serves as an authority for

position] Anthropologie", fol. 10–11 The cut is unmistakable – although one needs not make any 'hiatus', any unbridgeable metaphysical 'abyss' between human beings and the rest of the natural beings –/ In the series of existence [*In der Reihe der Existenz*], complete continuity between human beings and the rest of the natural beings prevails – / and yet the human being is – thanks to the gift of symbolic forms – something 'essentially' other –/ it is distinguished by its *essence* –/ to carry this out [...]."

⁴⁵ Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, Vol. 1, p. 11.

⁴⁶ Cassirer, "Seminar on Symbolism and Philosophy of Language. Vorlesung New Haven 1941/1942", p. 251.

⁴⁷ Cassirer, "Seminar on Symbolism and Philosophy of Language. Vorlesung New Haven 1941/1942", p. 251.

Cassirer as he has shown that any form of animal life has at its disposal its specific “webs of characteristics and effects [*Merk- und Wirknetz*]” which come to expression in their own way in the operation of life.⁴⁸ That also holds for human beings, life forms whose being is revealed in their action to the extent that they first open the horizon of their environment in space and time and transform it through linguistic activity into a cultural world. The web of characteristics and effects of the human organism is thus in principle a symbolic web, that is, insofar as we can speak of a differentiation of a specifically human nature or a particular opening of the environment. The capacity for mediated perception, for symbolic thinking and for linguistic expression is part of the general development of life and at the same time the distinguishing criterion of the natural development of human life. Cassirer thus attributes a decisive role to language. It is, as it were, the fundamental capacity of human beings. “Language is to be regarded as the very focus of all human activities. None of these activities would be possible without its constant help. It may be compared to a spiritual ether that fills the whole space of our human life.”⁴⁹

Cassirer’s conception of language as the fundamental symbolic expressive achievement leads to the thesis that the comparison with allegedly pre-human or extra-human languages miss language itself as a specifically anthropological concept. Only human language is linked to the application of symbols, only it is distinguished by a moment of spontaneity. Only the human being has the opportunity to express a thought by different symbols and only it has the choice of using the respectively fitting symbol in the communicative situation. “This modifiability and adaptability is one of the greatest achievements of human speech; it prepares and makes possible that modifiability of thought that is the very basis of all the other human activities.”⁵⁰ The choice of the terms modifiability and adaptability shows the proximity of Cassirer’s theory of language and culture to the evolutionary biology of his time. It is precisely in this context that the question of how the continuum of a general process of life and the discontinuity of a human *a priori* of symbolic activity refer to one another becomes precarious. Cassirer’s considerations remain only a sketch at this decisive point. It is certain that the capacity of language in the sense of an “inner form” is the distinguishing characteristic of human beings. The development of its further intellectual capacities depends on it, without it the gradual humanization of its world is incom-

48 See von Uexküll, *Umwelt und Innenwelt der Tiere*, pp. 44–49; his *Theoretische Biologie*, Chapter 5: “Die Welt der Lebewesen”, pp. 99–107.

49 Cassirer, *Vorlesungen und Studien zur philosophischen Anthropologie (1939–1943)*, p. 303.

50 Cassirer, “Seminar on Symbolism and Philosophy of Language. Vorlesung New Haven 1941/1942”, p. 341.

prehensible. Language and thought, inner form and external formation are thus in reciprocal dependence. Thus Cassirer supposes, without supplying evidence on this account, that an adaption of the symbol takes place in the human environment. The human world is distinguished by a dialectical tension between, on one hand, the spontaneity of symbolic activity and, on the other, the stability of a world of forms that is already secured. Summarizing his discussions, language, according to Cassirer, is the centre of the symbolic activity of the human spirit and the medium of its becoming external form in religious systems, legal institutions or scientific models and practices.

Cassirer's anthropology implies an answer to the problem set by Steinthal. By means of linguistic development we can study how, besides a continuity in natural events there is also development, thus a differentiation inside the world of the organic in the way of a distancing of the human being from the organic world. For Cassirer it comes down to banishing the Darwinian notion of development in the medium of language. The development of language, then, does not mean the simple continuation of processes in the organic world but rather nature's progressively becoming language [*voranschreitende Versprachlichung*]. Becoming language is humanization – that is a hypothesis that has been strongly represented since Steinthal and that also stands at the centre of Cassirer's work. For Cassirer the analysis of the development of language serves as a guideline for his considerations on the cultural development of human beings. The objectification of an essentially alien external world that is indifferent to sense takes place in the medium of language. The goal of development is the realization of the possibilities of being human, the redemption of a humanity projected from Steinthal up to Cohen as unity in the diversity of human expressive achievements. Thus, we read in Cassirer's *Essay on Man* (1944): "If the term 'humanity' means anything at all it means that, in spite of all the differences and oppositions existing among its various forms, these are, nevertheless, all working toward a common end."⁵¹

51 Cassirer, *An Essay on Man*, p. 78.

8 Conclusion – Language, Culture and Individuality

Et Israël, par delà l'Israël charnel,
englobe toutes les personnes qui se refusent
au verdict purement autoritaire de l'Histoire.
(Emanuel Levinas) ¹

A line of tradition of reflection on the theory of language comes to an end in Cassirer's work. In the face of this finding, a much contested question which has been treated by scholars over the last thirty years moves into the background. For it does not add anything to our insights into the historical constellation of this time if we class Cassirer's work as belonging to one philosophical school or place it exclusively within the environment of a "philosophy of Judaism", which is the title of Julius Guttman's book that does not take Cassirer into consideration.² This contested question has led to a wealth of detailed knowledge but has also become exhausted in the process.³ Cassirer himself had removed his own work from this classification.

The subject of my analysis is the aspects of Cassirer's work that he had made explicit. Belonging to this is the fact that he had placed himself in the tradition of the theory of language and culture that was treated above. Additionally, the work of Hermann Cohen is decisive for Cassirer's approach from the outset and it never completely loses this guiding function. For him, his teacher Cohen is the greatest contemporary thinker of an ideal humanity, alongside Albert Schweitzer.⁴ He sees himself as committed to an objective idealism that maintains that the human being is more than the sum of its material elements or expressive achievements and further that humanity is more than a summation of real historical facts. His scattered statements on Cohen's work suggest that Cassirer takes up and transforms the basic ideas of Cohen's work, namely the correlation between the three concepts of human being, humanity, and God by placing them in a decidedly secular context.⁵ In a constellation that operates

1 Levinas, "Franz Rosenzweig – Une Pensée Juive Moderne", p. 221.

2 See Guttman, *Die Philosophie des Judentums*.

3 For information on this, see the editor's introduction "Zum Begriff der jüdischen Philosophie" in: Kilcher (ed.), *Lexikon jüdischer Philosophen*, pp. VII–XVIII.

4 Cassirer, "Albert Schweitzer as Critic of Nineteenth-Century Ethics".

5 Kluback, *The Idea of Humanity*, p. 99: "Cassirer remained loyal to Cohen's ethical Idealism [...] Although Cassirer did not often quote the enormous debt that he owed Cohen, the fact that eth-

with the opposition between “Athens and Jerusalem”, as Leo Strauss calls it, Cassirer explicitly decided for Athens and philosophy and against Jerusalem and the ideas of revelation. However, for Cassirer that does not imply a break with his convictions and a turn from Cohen’s doctrine. In his lifetime he emphasized that, in terms of the intent and aim in his own philosophical reflection, he did not deviate from the position of his teacher – it is only the path to the goal that became different.⁶ These statements demand a close reading of Cassirer’s texts. The further questions of whether Cassirer’s work, as regards its relationship to that of his teacher Cohen and the Neo-Kantianism of his coinage, constitutes a “deepening and modernization”,⁷ “transformation”⁸ or “reformulation”⁹ that is subordinate to these considerations.

A way of reading Cassirer’s philosophy that seems to be authoritative today takes its basic idea to be the following: “with the process of symbolization, [Cassirer had] also clarified the humane sense of civilization in general”.¹⁰ This description is in need of supplementation because on one hand it suppresses the fact that Cassirer’s analysis of the structure of the symbolization process only provides a formal determination. And it is incomplete because Cassirer’s humanistic establishment of positions in the theory of language and culture takes place in a precarious proximity and differentiation to his teacher’s three figures of thought, the impact of which on the German-Judaic context is scarcely to be overestimated and is also not entirely excluded from his work. Cassirer’s positions have a paradigmatic character that must be developed. First, there is correlation between a “true idea of Germanness” and the “formation of humanity”,¹¹ sec-

ical universalism remained the constant in his thought reveals an attachment to Cohen that is undeniable and continuous.”

6 See Toni Cassirer, *Mein Leben mit Ernst Cassirer*, p. 94 and Sieg, *Aufstieg und Niedergang des Marburger Neukantianismus*, p. 333.

7 See Orth, *Von der Erkenntnistheorie zur Kulturphilosophie*, p. 68.

8 See Paetzold, *Ernst Cassirer*, p. 14.

9 See Ferrari, “Ist Cassirer methodisch gesehen ein Neukantianer?”, p. 107.

10 See Habermas, “Die befreiende Kraft der symbolischen Formgebung”, p. 38: “In the symbolic constitution of human existence and the symbolic mediation of its dealing with life [*Lebensvollzug*], the direction of a human way of life [*Lebensführung*] traced out [*vorgezeichnet*]. [...] Therefore Cassirer refuses to see only an ethical ideal in the ideal of humanity [*Humanitätsideal*] of the 18th century. [...] A theory that, with the process of symbolization, also enlightens the human meaning of civilizing already achieves by its nature what a philosophical ethics should achieve.”

11 See Cohen, *Deutschtum und Judentum*. On this see also Löwith, “Philosophie der Vernunft und Religion der Offenbarung in Hermann Cohens Religionsphilosophie”, p. 359: “Cohen’s philosophical error consists not in his lifelong endeavour to know himself as a German Jew but in his holding it for necessary to have Germany as the fatherland and home [*vaterländischen Heimat*],

ond, the correlation of Judaic religiosity and “cosmopolitan humanity”,¹² and third, the correlation of the idea of God and the ideal of humanity.¹³

Research has been silent about the first correlation-thesis in particular. Cassirer changed it into a hypothesis:

Whether this correlation, as demanded by our great and greatest, as the fulfilment of the concept of Germanness, will assert and prove itself; whether German thought will retain the power to master the completely new political-material tasks that await it, without thereby being unfaithful to fundamental principles on which the unity and shape of German intellectual culture rests, that is the question to which all our historical-philosophical reflection is urgently referred back to anew, day in and day out. We increasingly feel that the idea of the German state, as it was grasped and expressed by thinkers of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, has yet to withstand its really most difficult and deepest historical test. The future must decide whether it is called upon to intervene as a “substantial” power in actual historical becoming and nonetheless to preserve the original purity and ideal freedom, by means of which all merely contingent and empirical conditions of the given are overcome.¹⁴

It is clear here that Cassirer’s “Germanness” is a socio-cultural ideal that intervenes in historical events only as a future power, as an ideal that is not yet realized but is nonetheless striven for. While Cohen appealed to “national feeling [Volksgefühl]” and ideality is also almost coincident with political reality (in the time of the First World War), Cassirer remains faithful to a fundamental idea of Cohen’s and rescinds the emphasis on the present as over against an opening to the future. Nevertheless, in these years his ideal of humanity is not yet as airy as in the ground-breaking essay of 1939. Yet he aims at a unity of “Germanness” and “world citizenship”, like Cohen’s orientation towards the ideas of legality, and like statehood in Kant, Fichte and Humboldt.¹⁵ Thus in *Freedom and Form* [*Freiheit und Form*] Cassirer too speaks of “a deeper teleological ground” that is revealed in the history of political ideas of the German people with regard to the development of humanity.¹⁶

to have a ‘home’ as philosopher at all, as if the historical world of co-existence and environment [*Mitwelt und Umwelt*] into which one is contingently born [*hineingeboren*], is also already the one and the whole of the world [*das Eine und Ganze der Welt wäre*] which philosophy is concerned with in the thinking of the one and the whole [*um die es der Philosophie als dem Denken des Einen und Ganzen geht*].”

12 Cohen, “Die Bedeutung des Judentums für den religiösen Fortschritt”, p. 35.

13 Cohen, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*.

14 See Cassirer, *Freiheit und Form*, pp. 573–574.

15 Cohen, “Über das Eigentümliche des deutschen Geistes”, pp. 527 ff.

16 Cassirer, *Freiheit und Form*, p. 542; and the impressive concluding passage in *Freiheit und Form*, pp. 573–574.

The first correlation hypothesis is supplemented by a second that Cassirer does not bid farewell to in his later years. In his lectures and essays (such as *The Meaning of Judaism for Religious Progress* [*Die Bedeutung des Judentums für den religiösen Fortschritt*] and *The Inner Relations of Kantian Philosophy to Judaism* [*Innere Beziehungen der Kantischen Philosophie zum Judentum*]), this guiding idea is presented once again. What is at stake is the thought of a correlation between structural principles in German intellectual history and in the Judaic history of religion. Cohen speaks here of having a “fellowship of the heart [*Herzengemeinschaft*] with Kant”¹⁷ and justifies this through a comparison of the Kantian idealization of the civilizing process with Messianism in Judaism. “Whoever believes in eternal peace believes in the Messiah; not in the one who has come but he who is to come and who will come.”¹⁸ On his view, the correlation of Judaic religiosity and “cosmopolitan humanity” rests on his fundament.¹⁹ It seems obvious to him that such a true humanity is only actualized in German intellectual history.²⁰ In his *Ethics of the Pure Will* (1907) it is said that “the age of humanity [is ...] the age of critical philosophy. Therewith humanity in its entirety has entered into the system of philosophy.”²¹

However, Cohen shows himself most impressively as a thinker of humanity in his last, posthumously published work *The Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism* [*Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*] (1919). Here he empathetically describes the task of philosophical ethics in a manner that is programmatic for a humanistic foundation of a philosophy of culture in Cassirer’s sense.

The I of human beings becomes in it [philosophical ethics] the I of humanity [*Menschheit*]. And only in humanity is the true objectification which can ethically secure the human subject realized. So long as the human being is not capable of the objectification of itself, it remains caught in the indeterminacy of the empirical and the purity is not attained which ethics in its basic method has in accordance with its task. It is then only a sensible, and as such not yet a historical individual. It is this only achieved by the fact that the methodological means of history come to their realization in the concept of history itself. However, all these methodological means of the historical human beings have humanity as their

17 Cohen, “Innere Beziehungen der Kantischen Philosophie zum Judentum”, p. 301. See Habermas, “Der deutsche Idealismus der jüdischen Philosophen”.

18 Cohen, “Innere Beziehungen der Kantischen Philosophie zum Judentum”, p. 302.

19 Cohen, “Die Bedeutung des Judentums für den religiösen Fortschritt”, p. 35.

20 See Adelman, “Die ‘Religion der Vernunft’ im ‘Grundriss der Gesamtwissenschaft des Judentums’”.

21 Cohen, *Ethik des reinen Willens*, p. 633.

target concept. Ethics can only recognize and acknowledge human beings absolutely as humanity.²²

Cohen's thesis is that the human being can only objectify its self-image, can only gain distance to itself as socio-culturally situated individual, if he or she reflects this self-image in the target concept of humanity. It is in this sense that it is well known that, in a systematic regard, the last word of the philosophy of culture is: "Man has to be defined by humanity."²³

Yet in Cohen the teleological principle of historical development is supported not only by the ideal of humanity as the principle of history's unity but also, over and beyond this, by being traced back to the Messianic structure of history and the strict monotheism of the Judaic prophecy. At the centre of his great work *The Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism* is the chapter "The Idea of the Messiah and Humanity". Here it is said that a historical constellation stands as the beginning of the ethical process of objectification. Cohen describes the exceptional influence of Israel's prophets. While in the entirety of antiquity the political horizon of the *Polis* and its own people was also the world-historical horizon, this constellation suddenly and radically changed. "As if they arose from a new world, the prophets stood up and politicized as if they were they cosmopolitans of the 18th century."²⁴ We find similar attributions in the history of religion in Ernest Renan and Julius Wellhausen, in Eduard Meyer and Max Weber.²⁵ For Cohen it comes down to, for one, the creative moment and, for another, the exceptional power of the Judaic prophets.²⁶ It is a whole tangle of motives and external conditions, that thereto lead to the idea of one God being introduced and that practically devoured the idea of monotheism. That is particularly the question concerning the meaning and value of individual life, in the answering of which the human being outgrows myth or naïve consciousness. According to Cohen with this question there arises the idea of the world as "of the *Aion*, as the world which includes human life".²⁷

22 Cohen, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, p. 15. See Holzhey, "Der systematische Ort der 'Religion der Vernunft' im Gesamtwerk Hermann Cohens".

23 Cassirer, *An Essay on Man*, p. 78.

24 Cohen, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, p. 283.

25 See Hartung, "Der 'eminent historische Charakter jüdischer Prophetie' – Religionsphilosophische Betrachtungen bei Julius Wellhausen, Max Weber und Hermann Cohen".

26 Cohen, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, p. 284: "No people and no spirit of the earth has thought the only God [*Kein Volk und kein Geist der Erde hat den einzigen Gott gedacht*]."

27 Cohen, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, p. 285. See also Gibbs, "Hermann Cohen's Messianism: The History of the Future", pp. 333 – 334.

Cohen provides a “psychology of the unity of cultural consciousness”, as he had already announced in the concluding chapter of his *Ethics of Pure Willing*.²⁸ And he expands it to a larger world-historical panorama in which the philosophy of religion provides the key to the overall vision.²⁹ It is decisive for his perspective that the beginning of monotheism as a world-historical fact is signalled as a groundless event. According to Cohen, there is a miracle that is in the beginning like a promise that refers to the end of a process of objectification at which the unity of cultural consciousness would emerge in actuality, that is, human beings would have completely objectified their self-image in the ideal image of humanity. This miracle is the historical miracle of the idea of the one God and the historical promise of the unity of humanity.

Thus monotheism in itself is the immediate cause of both Messianism and of the concept of world history as the history of humanity. Without the one God, the idea of humanity could not arise. And without the idea of humanity, history remains only a problem of knowledge of peoples based on one’s own people.³⁰

The idea of the one God which articulates itself as an event requires a radical change of perspective: from the sensible to the ideal, from the present to the future. Cohen goes so far as to say that human culture only constitutes itself in this perspective on the future.³¹ For without the capacity for distancing from actuality, self-objectification as the basis of cultural existence would be only contingent. However, the contingency of the event appears *a posteriori* as soon as the world-historical perspective is assumed to be a necessary historical fact. This facticity, however, does not only receive its sense from out of a past, for this must always remain groundless, but from a future towards which it points. This change is manifested in the ideality of the belief in a Messiah.

28 Cohen, *Ethik des reinen Willens*, p. 636.

29 See Rosenzweig, “Einleitung” in: Cohen, *Jüdische Schriften*, Vol. 1, pp. XIII–LXIV; here p. XIX. Cohen had project the project of a “psychology of cultural consciousness”. The “unconscious [...] and actually brilliant Hegelianism of this neo-Kantian had, in this psychology of the objective spirit” lead to a deed comparable to Hegel but he had not worked out these thoughts in detail. In its place is his last book on the philosophy of religion which will still live, when one day this system too will go the way of all systems [*das noch leben wird, wenn einst auch dieses System den Gang aller Systeme gegangen sein wird: die Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*]: the religion of reason out of the sources of Judaism.” On this see also, Liebschütz, *Von Georg Simmel zu Franz Rosenzweig*, pp. 164 ff.

30 Cohen, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, p. 306.

31 Cohen, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, p. 291.

Time is the future and only the future. Past and present sink into this time of the future. This fall into time is the purest idealization. All existence disappears before this standpoint of the idea. The existence of the human being is sublated into this being of the future.³²

The belief in a Messiah, which refers to the pure idealization of time in the future, is the manifestation of an idea of the beginning and end of the process of self-objectification of the human being and the unity of its cultural consciousness that would not be convincing without this belief.³³ The philosopher of religion Hermann Cohen does not abandon this conviction.

In a lecture on *Cohen's Philosophy of Religion*, held in June 1935 for the Oxford Jewish Society, Cassirer commented on Cohen's fundamental ideas and gave them a peculiar twist.³⁴ For Cohen, according to Cassirer, the idea of God possesses "reality", that is, an effective force in the history of humanity. It is only in this way that the idea of God for him becomes equivalent to the belief in the universality and necessity of the ideal of humanity. The idea of God correlates with the idea of humanity: "it means, that in spite of all the empirical differences between men, Mankind *itself* must be considered as an ideal Whole, as an unbroken unity".³⁵ Cassirer argues as follows: whoever speaks of humanity must apprehend it ideally under the aspect of unity. Humanity means a regulative idea, without which a philosophical synthesis of the empirical findings of human life would not be possible:

If we do not presuppose such a fundamental unity, then human society will remain enigmatic and incomprehensible for us. If the conceptual term has any meaning for us, then it is this: all human forms of expression, aside from their differences and contradictions, nonetheless exist in cooperation with one another and tend towards a common goal. A higher criterion, a universal character, must finally be found in which they all agree and harmonize.³⁶

32 Cohen, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, p. 291.

33 Cohen, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, p. 292: "The being of God too is an other under the power of this idea. The creator [of] heaven and earth does not suffice for this being of the future. He must create "a new heaven and a new earth". The being of the previous history is also insufficient for nature; it required development for the course of things. And development presupposes a goal towards which it strives. Thus is the progress in the history of the human race required."

34 Cassirer: "Cohen's Philosophy of Religion", pp. 100–101.

35 Cassirer, "Cohen's Philosophy of Religion", p. 101.

36 Cassirer, "An Essay on Man. A Philosophical Anthropology", p. 403: "If we do not presuppose such a fundamental unity human civilisation becomes enigmatical and unintelligible. If the term 'humanity' means anything at all it means that, in spite of all the differences and oppositions between the various forms, they are cooperating with each other and make so to speak

Cassirer seems to be of the view that in the process of the self-objectification, the ideal of humanity has been detached from the idea of the one God. In any case, he dissolves Cohen's fundamental correlation, without which the latter could not think any further, and maintains the precarious independence of the ideal of humanity. The implication is obvious: Cassirer assigns the moments of Messianism and monotheism, to which Cohen had linked the creative potential of the historical dynamic, to mere structural moments of temporality and unity in the process of a dialectic of symbolic "consciousness" that articulates itself in the domains of language, art, religion and so on.³⁷ But then he must, as was already evident in 1916 under different circumstances, enlist his conception of a "deeper teleological ground", if he does not want to return to Cohen's proposal of a fundamental correlation between humanity and the singular God.

The tradition to which Cassirer is indebted becomes clear in this context as well, as does what he intends with his project of a humanistic grounding of the philosophy of culture. In precarious proximity and distance to the approach of his teacher Cassirer, the groundlessness of his conception of the philosophy of culture is striking and the task of its subsequent grounding is urgent. In fact, in Cassirer's later work, Martin Heidegger's provocation in the Davos Disputation in 1929 continues to have a lasting influence on Cassirer's later work. The latter had remarked:

One could say that for Cassirer the *terminus ad quem* is the whole of a philosophy of culture in the sense of an elucidation of the wholeness of the forms of the formative consciousness. For Cassirer, the *terminus ad quo* is utterly problematic. [...] Cassirer's point is to emphasize the various forms of the formation in order, with a view to these formations, subsequently to point out a certain dimension of the formative powers themselves.³⁸

We understand the reference to the indeterminacy of the *terminus a quo* as an evaluation of the price that Cassirer is willing to pay as he no longer wants to substantiate his philosophy of culture "from the source" of a particular tradition.

This result can also be positively formulated. Cassirer projects a theory of human beings that operates with far-reaching indeterminacy and individuality. His concept of the "animal symbolicum", which is his formula for the indefina-

common cause with each other. There must at last be found an outstanding feature, a universal character in which they agree and harmonize." [Translation by Gerald Hartung]

37 Cassirer, "An Essay on Man. A Philosophical Anthropology", pp. 418–419.

38 On this see the protocol of the Davos Disputation between Ernst Cassirer and Martin Heidegger in Heidegger, *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, pp. 260–261. This citation from Richard Taft's English translation, with minor alterations: Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, pp. 193–207.

bility of the human being, implies an ideological neutrality in principle. The objections to such an idealistic operation are obvious. But they are not quite as simple as Heidegger suggests in his brief remark, for he avoids the question concerning the *terminus ad quem* of Cassirer's philosophy of culture. It is not that Cassirer subsequently introduces a "certain dimension of the formative powers", but from the outset a teleological principle of human formative power is taken as a basis, whose reality he tries to capture in the concept of humanity. "Man has to be defined by humanity" – only in the light of an idealization of the human being do we approach its determination. Cassirer's transition from the theory of language to anthropology and the theory of culture turns out to be an integration of his positions on the theory of language in a larger context. His *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* can, in its fundamental features, be understood as an expansion of Steinthal's theory of language and a reworking of Cohen's philosophy of religion into a theory of culture.

This brings us to the end of a story which began with a fundamentally new idea. Discourse on language as a natural generation of the spirit emerged in the theories of language and culture in the shadow of Humboldt, namely those of Heyse and Steinthal. For them, what is at issue is on the one hand a de-substantialization of language and the claim of its radical diversity in respective historical origin, as well as the determination of a double aspect of nature and culture. It is true that nature generates culture and, inversely, that culture can generate nature. It is constitutive of the human being that no boundary can be drawn between natural and artificial factors in him or her, nor in regards to his or her relation to the external world. While his or her culturality stands in a determinate and to-be-ever-more-precisely-investigated tension within which the nature of the human being stands, his or her culturality also generates a particular nature. This view gained acceptance from Steinthal up to Cassirer – and, from being a fundamental idea of the theory of language, it has become a premise of research into the theory of culture and anthropology. It was concisely put forward in Cohen's formulation of the human being in nature and nature in the human being, before it was passed on to cultural anthropology in Cassirer's figure of thought of the "*animal symbolicum*".³⁹

A conception of a unity between nature and spirit in an irresolvable entanglement and laden with tension had been portrayed by Steinthal as "Kantianized Spinozism". Although this formulation has today lost its succinctness, and its provocation of the suspicion of Spinozism has evaporated, it nonetheless indicates the problem of language as Steinthal conceived it. For him, language is the

39 See Hartung, *Philosophische Anthropologie*, pp. 104–111.

embodiment of spirit whose individual form is always present in the generation of language and forms of judgment. Thus we must think of the constitution of individuality in the interweaving of spiritual and material moments of a process. Lazarus had adopted this assumption in order to, as a second step, carry out a detailed analysis of the structural context of the world in which the individual is situated. Hence we see the tense dialectic in his work between the individual (creating language) and the people (connection and commitment in language) which he develops into a theory of objective spirit.

This tension between spirit and nature is not to be sublated in reality for neither a beginning nor an end of the process of apperception or even its interruption is thinkable. Language is constantly generated and transformed – and with it, the individual, as are the people and the respective culture as the frame of reference for the constitution of the individual. In the course of an analysis of the process of apperception, the path leads from psychology through the theory of language to the theory of culture. We see that the key to a theory of the construction of the historical and socio-cultural world lies in the expansion of the doctrine of apperception. Lazarus portrays the foundations of this theory in his discussions of the spirit of language in conversation. Further examples include humour as the individual's attempt to integrate itself in the world in spite of irreconcilable tensions, as well as tact, being the individual's effort to smooth over the irrevocability of the tensions and thus enabling a form of co-existence. In laughing, a fine example of the interweaving, laden with tension, between spirit and nature, it becomes clear that the possible human balance to be attained always is and always remains precarious.

What cannot be completely achieved in reality can, however, be brought to a form in ideality. In humour, in tactful dealings, in the serenity or letting be of the encounter with the world, in the ideal of love, in the eternity of symbolic expression and in the goal of peace, scholars from Steinthal to Cassirer indicate how it is possible for we humans to embrace everything human. The name of this ideal reads "humanity". This ideal itself depends on a distinction for the sense of the ideal of humanity as a cultural reality that remains contested. For either, a double correlation between human being-humanity and humanity-God (Cohen) or one simply between human being-humanity (Cassirer) is presupposed. The fundamental idea of whether the origin, development and future of human culture are indebted to the "norm of monotheism" and the singularity of a Judaic Messianism (Lazarus, Cohen), or whether they rely on an immanent cultural teleology depends on this difference. Beyond this difference, according to which religion is shown to be the fundament of culture or as a cultural factor among others, both positions agree in their vehement critique of contemporary naturalism in theory and practice. What is at stake is holding on to a resilient concept of

individuality as the successful, if also precarious, integration of spirit and nature into a unity. What is further at stake is the project of a successful integration of the human being in its external nature, this being understood as the symbolic world or society.

Mauthner's radical scepticism breaks with this optimistic-constructive world-view. The struggle for the preservation of the individual before the generalizations of an external reality (nature and society) is radicalized, which latter receives, in the perspective of a comprehensive developmental history, a perfectly compelling, or even conquering character. Mauthner's critique of language is ruthless, resigned and despairing. It breaks up all figures of correlation and removes the individual from any determination and determinability. That is, as it were, the null point of the critique of culture and the final consequence of the history presented here, but only under a negative aspect. Mauthner's negativity provides, so to speak, the blueprint for understanding how Cassirer's symbolic theoretical approach must involve a defusing of radical linguistic scepticism. However, it also provides a clue for answering the question of why, in the wake of Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig and Emmanuel Levinas advocate a (re-)construction of the correlation between the human being and God as the constellation that vouches for reality in a world devoid of meaning.

Franz Rosenzweig has made the point that Cassirer's way of thinking represented a deviation from the insights of his teacher Cohen. It is also remarkable that Rosenzweig himself has undergone a comparable development.⁴⁰ In his first main work *Hegel and the State* [*Hegel und der Stadt*] (drafted in 1912)⁴¹ he still indulges in the idea of the world-historical mission of German philosophy, before, in the years of the First World War, turning to Cohen's philosophy of religion and takes the path of a "new thinking".⁴² Rosenzweig's second main work, *The Star of Redemption* [*Der Stern der Erlösung*] (1921), deals with this new thinking and offers the insight that traditional institutions and forms of thinking have lost their function. The question concerning the human being, concerning God and the world, must be engaged without reservation and its own necessities for thinking must be created. Correlations are not found, but constructed. If this construction is successful, then the result of the new thinking is of substantial content.⁴³ Rosenzweig emphasizes the event-character of thinking. In this way, he emphasises an aspect of Cohen's philosophy of religion, the

⁴⁰ See Mendes-Flohr, "Jüdisches Kultur- und Geistesleben".

⁴¹ See Rosenzweig, *Hegel und der Staat*.

⁴² See Rosenzweig, "Einleitung" in: Cohen: *Jüdische Schriften*, Vol. 1, p. XIII–LXIV.

⁴³ See the development of this thesis in Stéphane Moses, *Système et Révélation*.

emergence of the idea of monotheism as historical event – disregarding all teleological aspects of historical development, which are so important to Cassirer.

Rosenzweig's attempt to give new strength and truthfulness to philosophical thinking by updating its historical sources in Judaism, lead to a dramatic scenario. Superficially, what is at stake is the question concerning the legitimate succession to Cohen and an allegedly gross discrepancy.

Recently in Davos a discussion between Cohen's most important student, Ernst Cassirer, and the present custodian of Cohen's Marburg's chair Heidegger took place before a European forum [...]. And here Heidegger, the student of Husserl, whose holding of Cohen's chair can only be felt as an irony of intellectual history, advocated, against Cassirer, for a philosophical stance, the very stance of our new thinking, which is wholly in line with that of the "last Cohen".⁴⁴

Emmanuel Levinas, who as a student had witnessed the meeting between Cassirer and Heidegger in Davos, initially positioned himself – and without knowing of Rosenzweig's remark cited – inside this constellation on Heidegger's side. Following this, while not going over to Cassirer (whose stance Levinas nonetheless held in high regard) he proceeds in uncovering a line of German-Judaic thinking by recourse to Rosenzweig's writings. It is a line without tradition for, in the face of the political and also intellectual catastrophes of the 20th century, retaining a "deep teleological ground" in the course of history and a *terminus ad quem* of the cultural history of humanity is, on Levinas' view, no longer possible.⁴⁵

A line of tradition in German-Judaic reflection on the theory of language and culture thus also finds its appropriate end in the radicalism of his thought. It is manifested in the thesis that Levinas works out in his essay *Franz Rosenzweig – Une Pensée Juive Moderne* [*Franz Rosenzweig – A Modern Jewish Thought*] (1965).⁴⁶ On his view, a turn from history in its misunderstanding as historical teleology occurs in the uncoupling of Judaic thinking from the horizon of the German history of spirit. Rosenzweig had carried out this turn, as Levinas underlines. "Rosenzweig's thought presents itself as a revolt against Hegel."⁴⁷

It is Levinas' view that Rosenzweig had sought for an answer within Judaism to the crisis of humanity, for which there is no longer any support in this world. For him, Judaism is an inescapable moment in the economy of being and thinking after all attempts at a representation of the adequacy of our thinking to ac-

⁴⁴ See Rosenzweig, "Vertauschte Fronten", pp. 235–237.

⁴⁵ On this, see Emmanuel Levinas' impressive studies from the middle of the 1930s, *Quelques Réflexions sur la Philosophie de l'Hitlérisme*. Levinas, *De l'Évasion*, Paris 1935.

⁴⁶ Levinas, "Franz Rosenzweig – Une Pensée Juive Moderne".

⁴⁷ Levinas, "Franz Rosenzweig – Une Pensée Juive Moderne", p. 211.

tuality for the world in which we live have broken down. According to Levinas, Rosenzweig is an outstanding representative of modern, European Judaism. However, here as in Cohen, the Judaic aspect is not just to be understood as particular but rather as a tendency towards an ethical universalism. This, however, is not simply given by and to be taken over from the tradition. The ethical universalism in Judaism is not permitted to be blind in one eye, like the Christian in Hegel's thinking. Blindness means an absence of reflexivity regarding its boundedness to its standpoint or, otherwise expressed, the submission to a neutral point of view and standpoint in the historical process from out of which its unity can be constructed.

In Rosenzweig and Levinas, the thinker him- or herself is no longer a “*quantité négligeable*” of their philosophical system. In philosophizing, what is at stake is themselves, their taking of a position to the world. With their name, they stand up for their thinking. That is what Rosenzweig had tried to show, when he had ventured the claim that in world history it depends on [*es ankommt*] the standpoint of Judaism as well as of Christianity and of Islam. His argument directs itself against Hegel's “anonymous history” of the world spirit. Whoever does not take up a position, that means, does not stand up for “*être juif*” is denied the competence to judge the course of history. A distanced stance towards the universal and the all-assuming [*einnehmenden*] claim of one [*der einen*] world history is the condition for the possibility of being able to judge the course of history (*juger l'histoire*). “And Israel, beyond the carnal Israel, includes all persons who refuse the purely authoritarian verdict of history.”⁴⁸

The essay on the modern Judaic thinker Franz Rosenzweig can be read for large stretches as a commentary on Levinas's book *Totality and Infinity* [*Totalité et Infini*] (1961).⁴⁹ Levinas himself had remarked that almost every line of this book is indebted to Rosenzweig's thought. What is at issue in this text too is finding an immovable standpoint from which the gravitational pull of the historical processes can be resisted. The path of the new thinking knows compromises. “From the reduction to irreducibility – that is the course of the new thinking.”⁵⁰

48 Levinas, “Franz Rosenzweig – Une Pensée Juive Moderne”, p. 221. On this see also Paul Ricoeur's subtle attempt (in Ricoeur, *Geschichte und Wahrheit*, p. 74) to conceive the particularity and universality of history in its ambiguity and – in proximity to Hegel – and to prove [*den Nachweis zu erbringen?*] that it is “impossible to be a Hegelian”. See Hartung, “Abschied von der Geschichtsphilosophie? Paul Ricoeurs Geschichtsdenken im Kontext”.

49 Levinas, *Totalité et Infini*, pp. 5–6, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 28. All subsequent citations from this work are from the English translation.

50 Levinas, “Franz Rosenzweig – Une Pensée Juive Moderne”, p. 213. See Malka, *Lévinas*; Habib, *Lévinas et Rosenzweig*.

Totality and Infinity contains a vehement critique of the eschatology as a “beyond” of history. The point of departure is the claim that, in the shadow of Hegel, eschatology is reduced to mere evidence in the space of the finite. If, on the other hand, eschatology is to be rehabilitated, then that must happen by recourse to a concept of the infinite. That implies a purification of historical thinking from all traces of an immanent historical teleology.⁵¹ Only after this purification will the infinite, insofar as it withdraws from spatialization, prove itself to be resistant to the gravitational pull of a totalizing approach. It is then understood as pure temporality and creation. That is the new perspective in which Levinas undertakes a defence of “subjectivity [...] as founded in the idea of the infinity”.⁵² The infinite does not lie beyond the space of history but produces itself in the temporal-dynamic relation between self and other in historical events.

Here no correlation is given. Instead, the discourse is of the event, between self and other, that first establishes the possibilities that the individual is correlated with the individual. Levinas thus formulates a striking reservation against the view that we can presuppose the correlation between individual and people, human being and humanity, humanity and God. In Hegel’s thought the presupposition of correlative structures and the possibility of their sublimation run together and aim at the idea of a totality.⁵³ A “philosophy of the neuter” culminates in the neutralization of all cognitive, social, cultural and natural oppositions; it in principle presupposes, so to speak, their neutrality. For Levinas, history shows that a process of humanizing the world, when it is falsely understood as the process of neutralization, ends in the horrors of totalitarian regimes. In any case, thinking does not have the power to resist this change of humanity into barbarism because it has become standpointless. Levinas thus pleads for the preservation of the uniqueness of each self and each other.⁵⁴

Totality and neutrality are the Janus-face of modern history and theory of culture. The neutralization of each being’s constitution of its own enables totalitarian orders. As opposed to the successful mediation of the social, cultural and religious oppositions in idealistic positions, Levinas demands a new thinking that opens the way to a genuine state of peace. Peace is only to be had as “the unity of plurality”.⁵⁵ Although the path might be different, the philosophical

51 On this, see the excerpts of interesting research literature in France, Halpérin, Jean et al (ed.): *Difficile Justice*; Frogneux, Nathalie et al. (ed.), *Emmanuel Lévinas et l’histoire*; Bouretz, *Témoins du future*.

52 Levinas, *Totalité et Infini*, p. 11, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 26.

53 Levinas, *Totalité et Infini*, p. 14, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 26.

54 Levinas, *Totalité et Infini*, pp. 332–333, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 300–301.

55 Levinas, *Totalité et Infini*, p. 342, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 306.

work might identify itself as radically conflicting, in regard to his emphasis on the individual and his final word of peace Levinas avows a line of tradition that refers back beyond Cohen to Lazarus and Steinthal.

However, a great difference remains and must not be suppressed. In Rosenzweig and Levinas, trust in human language is completely lost. In the face of their unobscured view of the fatal dialectic that turns a totalization of the human in theory and practice into inhumanity, Mauthner's scepticism about language seems but empty prattle and Cassirer's attempt to bridge over the abyss of human linguistic praxis seems as a well-meant but futile project. Rosenzweig had impressively pointed out regarding this that the critique of ethical idealism of the 19th and earlier 20th century had consequences for reflection on the theory of language had almost immeasurable consequences for reflection on the theory of language. The loss of trust in the power of language and its functionality as the medium of the "between" seems almost irreparable. The rediscovery of language as an "organon" remains as the task that future generations can dedicate themselves to. In the face of this overwhelming task we can, as Rosenzweig remarked, only marvel at all the vain undertakings, after the expulsion from "God's garden of language" to reinstate trust in language in different ways. Such a trust is, as it says in the *Star of Redemption*, not to be regained this side of an event of revelation.⁵⁶

Levinas had not added to this consideration, but simply intensified it. The end of this history is not the end of all histories of human language and culture, but it does mark a caesura. The reflections on the theory of language and culture as prolegomena to a theory of the modern, which were influentially advanced by German-Jewish thinkers for almost a century, ends in a vote of no confidence against modern culture. We will have to seek other ways to arrive at a new trust – and one that is not blind – in the world that we find and form in language. At the end of this history lies a new beginning.

⁵⁶ See Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung*, pp. 161–163. On this see also Walter Benjamin's work on the theory of language, which will not be treated here because it has been treated in practically countless other studies. In the place of others, see Werner Hamacher's "Die Geste im Namen – Benjamin und Kafka" and Menninghaus, *Walter Benjamins Theorie der Sprachmagie*.

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